This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

NYPL RESEARCH LIBRARIES
3 3433 07485061 5

THE WHITE HOUND

FRANCES FORBES-ROBERTSON

NEW-YORK
SOCIETY
LIBRARY
1758

THE WHITE HOUND

THE WHITE HOUND

BY

FRANCES FORBES-ROBERTSON

NEW YORK
DODD, MEAD AND COMPANY
1913

THE NEW YORK
PUBLIC LIBRARY
131058B
ASTOR, LENOX AND
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS
B 1941 L

COPYRIGHT, 1913, BY
DODD, MEAD AND COMPANY

Published March, 1913

PROPERTY
OF THE
NEW YORK
PUBLIC LIBRARY

THE WHITE HOUND

CHAPTER I

His face was round like an owl's, round without fleshiness, suggesting proportion rather than bulk. His prominent eyes were large, and though suffused at times by a whimsical expression, wore habitually a sad one, which is a rare quality in aged eyes, for it would seem that Life, as she sweeps by, absorbs our emotions, leaving us the hulks we become before death: yet, for some caprice, she permits a few to retain the young heart, to grow no older at any rate in spirit with the passing years, and throws in, as it were, this sadness with an ironic gesture. He who will laugh to the end must weep too: is not that it? The mystery of sorrow, how always it accomplishes the reverse of its promise! No one who has ever been sad to tears can fail to know happiness—the action of immortality surely upon our mortal flesh, the spiritual resistance to evil that is hampered by the impotence of the body. Sorrowing is never a weakness. A person who cannot grieve deeply is a very limited person indeed, and quite hateful at last.

He was perhaps sixty, whilst looking both older and younger than his years, thin, and furrowed rather than wrinkled; he had the scholar's pallor with the inclination to flush unexpectedly, the immense domed forehead, the

nervous, sinewy hands and the stooping shoulders; but he had a mouth withal like a boy's, tender and sensitive, a humorous smile untouched by irony flickering at the corners, turning them habitually upwards. One must trust that smile or one dared trust nothing; it seemed to come in compensation for the sadness of the eyes and reassured one.

Here in his study, a light room at the top of the house, littered with a hundred appurtenances for scientific research and some huge volumes of reference, for the library proper was on the ground floor, one could scarcely think of him as *the husband—the father*—the commonly-understood head of the house, in spite of the fact that he was so intrinsically part of the old place. Given simply Donnington Grange with its dark halls, its atmosphere of mystery, the immense library—immense for so small a house—his personality was part of the whole whilst detached, one felt, from the common expected things of life. At table, for instance, he did not preside—impossible to think of him as host and yet always as the most important, most interesting figure there. He came to table as one who wished not to be noticed, with stooping shoulders and an absent look at the food placed before him; unpunctual too, so that often he ate alone. Visitors (one must admit there were hardly any) did not see him unless accidentally passing perhaps on the stairs, when they became conscious of a hesitating movement of greeting and then

he was gone. Those who knew Donnington knew him just as they knew it, as an effect upon the senses. The sequestered house with its shadowy corridors, its heavy atmosphere, weighted not only with the dead life of the past, as that of all old places, but with a present that defied familiarity, remaining a query to the imagination. And perhaps after all the few neighbours dwelling in the surrounding places were, with those of Donnington, not quite like the world about big cities or a frequented Arcady. Standards of comparison were absent and criticism hardly the fine accomplishment we have made it in our sophisticated centres.

The moor wrapped its inhabitants about with the atmosphere of its mystery; those unmoving waves of far-stretching lands with their hungry winds, the distant horizons and the vault of the great heavens unbroken by spire or chimney, were always an interruption in the commonplaces of the day's life—took human souls into their keeping, as it were, frustrated intimacies and nursed dreams. If the peasants never seemed to speak the truth they as rarely lied. Speech with them was a vehicle to be driven warily where there were no roads; their grave eyes looked a thousand things whilst their lips uttered a distracting monosyllable.

It was impossible to state the period in which Donnington had been built: architects differed. A humorist contended that it had not been built at all, but had

got there, like the original species. The very additions were ancient; the walls, however, which nested the house from the actual moor, were undoubtedly in their newest parts Queen Anne; the door with the lantern over it, and the bell which rang with a deep-toned murmur that reverberated through the surrounding silence. The garden might have been planned at the same period; it was formal with exquisite severity, and planted with yews of great height, perfectly clipped, and strangely enough with all their civilised aspect appearing more ominous than the most wild of wooded hedges. The prim hedge cultivated for many generations in the centre of order and gracious life affects us not a little as an old library will, the parchment-bound volumes that have outlasted so many lives in their sedate rows, though we may rarely touch them, filling us with some indefinite culture we can neither explain nor specify. A child nurseried in a library, we are inclined to think, will for all time possess a wisdom unattainable by the parvenu scholar; and so perhaps persons bred among yew hedges and formal rose gardens, with red-bricked paths, have a scented presence, a reserved formality inimitable.

Such were the wife and daughters of our scholar; the yew hedge and old library had endowed them with their mystery, and though one could not think of Malleson as a parent or husband, at once on seeing Mrs. Malleson and her daughters, Evelyn and Hester, one

must exclaim: "Ah! well, yes, *these* then!—but it was a concession." They with him seemed part of the old house, or, might it be better put, part of the old garden, so we do after all leave him isolated there in his immense attic overlooking the tops of the trees.

CHAPTER II

THERE was however a link, for daily the sound of footsteps came from below, soft footsteps padding up the stairs, the door was thrust open and a slender girl appeared. She was round-bosomed and upright, with free stepping limbs; her hair was the colour of pale corn and fell in ropes about her shoulders; her mouth was red and the lips curved, and her face was very beautiful. She sat with him most of the day hobnobbing over the books, helping in the labour of research, as a boy might, with an easy interest. She, like himself, was not quite of the family, whilst forming the link, as we have said. She was their child: the very sweet and conventional lady in the rose garden was her mother, and the girls, Evelyn and Hester, were her sisters, yet relationship was the last thought that came to one in regarding her. She was alone, as he was, in some solitude of personality. Wisdom looked out of her grave eyes, a wisdom beyond her years.

The love between them was very deep, their companionship absolute: he watched her, at times whimsically. What would her fate have been had she been born in an earlier century? he asked himself. Would not this very difference from her kind bring her suffering? Yet the instinct which prompted the burning

of witches in the past was alive enough in the hearts of men and women the world over—they had crucified the wise God. Century after century some excuse had been found to hamper, torture or destroy the wise men: without excuse or pretext the wise women had simply been burnt! This happened no longer, yet . . .

Her thoughts were always unprejudiced, clear, clean things. Her brain! Well, the only comparison he could think of was, not that she had the brain of a man in her child's body—all wisdom was sexless, in spite of the Greek and Assyrian persistence that it was feminine—but that of the super animal, the creature no longer an inarticulate prisoner as it would seem they are in their strange, beautiful bodies—freed as it were yet untainted by human prejudice.

"Rene, Rene, don't be a witch!" he found himself murmuring as they sat together huddled over a great tome on a very sunny afternoon reading about Semiramis.

"We'll have to burn you."

"One can never realise that they actually burned women!" she answered absently, moving to the window.

"Yes, they always did it, Rene; they don't burn witches now, but they are just as cruel. Don't be a witch."

"I wish I were a witch." She laughed, and went to

his side with a quick agility, put her arms round him, her tumbled pale hair falling over his face, and rubbed the edge of her cheek against his. Gradually the humorous reflectiveness was ousted from her eyes.

"I hate it!"

"Hate what?"

"The long story of man's cruelty to man—history in fact."

"Phew! you are shamefully ignorant. There are some wonders in history of the other kind of thing too."

"How can I be a wise witch if I am ignorant?"

"That is the truth—such is the only real wisdom."

"Then I had better not learn."

"Oh! it's a temptation this knowledge, but God wot how much it cloys our perceptions! . . . Now animals." He was looking at her. She repeated the word. She knew his thoughts were off on some queer scent.

"Oh! they are wonderful!" he said.

"Where have you strayed to anyway?" she queried.

He got up and walked about the room, touching things now and then in a distracting accompaniment. It was characteristic of these two that they reflected together as much as they talked, and could move dreamily on a line of thought without troubling for definite conclusions; they never came to an end, as it were, of speculation. The few knowable facts, on which are unhappily based all the prejudices and absurdities and ingenious lies by which man has been led by his nose

to awful doings, were theirs through very definite research, and only through objective research does the subjective world become real and its mystery wonderful.

"They are so direct," he went on, "we know nothing of them but their bodily habits. It is the great secret kept from us—they and immortality! It seems we may unearth most of Nature's secrets but these two."

"I never realise the difference between ourselves and animals as you do," she answered; "at times I feel very near them, nearer almost than to people."

"Ah!" he said, and paused again, then went on. "For all their subjection they are so mysteriously independent. There is none of the petty power over one another we find with men. If they interfere at all it is a vital interference. Human beings have too great a power over one another: the constant tyranny of one creature over his fellow is continuous till death," he smiled, "and after death through literature and tradition the tyranny goes on, and it is the weak over the strong, the slave over the free man—yet in vital things how little we dare move! . . . You—you have amazingly this power to resist."

"Oh! I am afraid of people."

"Because they threaten your instinct of freedom."

"I don't know—people seem to do such preposterous things by way of right. I suppose my point of view affects them in the same way, only they have the won-

derful power to make me feel hell and I don't think I ever succeed in making them feel that."

She laughed.

"It would seem as if the powers did give to wrong-doers a special belief in their own virtue. It is the only explanation of their survival. It is all nonsense about anyone being intentionally wicked, but it is a certainty that the greater mass of wrong-doers have committed their horror in the belief of its righteousness."

"Well, but doesn't this make it all awful—life! Isn't history one long story of hideous efforts of the kind? Man perpetually struggling, not against natural conditions—which surely have been bad enough—but against this conscience on the wrong tack." She paced the room as she talked, then she returned to her chair, and leaning her head in the palm of her hands she threw out, "But perhaps this is better than their awful idea of the devil."

"Oh! superstitiously I am for the devil," he answered quickly, a smile about the old mouth, "but how the devil he got in or is to get out—"

"We have made him and we must unmake him."

"When man's idea takes flesh and lives amidst us who can destroy it? His own conception becomes his master. Creation exceeds by infinite fold destruction."

"And if we create that which destroys?" she questioned.

"That's what's been done—the devil."

"And there is no devil!" she said.

"The idea!"

"And you can't destroy an idea."

"Yes, slowly with time. A human being you can kill in an instant. An idea, hundreds of years will not do the business, and the mystery of it all is that the origin of evil was not bad, but goodness."

"Oh! where are we getting to?"

"That there is no devil," he repeated with a laugh.

As they talked the warm afternoon sun crept over the room, shafts of light played across the papers and instruments, a magnifying-glass threw out coloured prisms and reflected in miniature the leaves of the tree outside the wide window. The window took up the whole side of the wall, and the rustling of the tops of the trees was almost audible through the glass. It was the time of day when an ache comes over the body to be out at any cost. The scholar closed instinctively the volume that had been open.

"I made an appointment with Crawley," he said with an expressive movement of the brows.

She was silent for some time as if what they had been saying must drift away first before she could place Crawley in her thoughts.

"It is such a lovely afternoon," she answered, "and there is the hay," she added.

"Oh! the hay . . . you must go."

"Come too."

"Well, Crawley."

"What in the world is the abomination coming for?" she murmured.

"Don't ask me—just muddle, muddle. I have put things off so—left too much to him—and he has a genius for letting one do it."

"One more day won't matter."

He looked from her to the window. Oh! the afternoon was serene, tempting: a perfect stillness lay everywhere, a vibrating quiet: human noises echoed pleasantly; retreating footsteps, and the shutting of a door or an answering voice. A sense of warm idleness crept over one's body, and he thought of the roses in the rose garden, the hay, the white path across the moor that would soon reach into the heart of a red sun; moreover, the sun was still high enough to promise a long afternoon, and against all this were accounts, blue paper and Crawley! Also worry—the accounts promised not to be pleasant at all, in fact they were to be very tiresome. Well! here was a reason for staying, and, as if to settle this definitely, the necessity, he moved to the window to take in something of, what he was going to miss—the fragrant air into his lungs, and the view of it all, the glimpse of the hayfield not a stone's throw away, the purple wood further off, some square patches of cultivated land beyond, everywhere the sea of the plains, blue and shimmery in the low light. He gave a faint smile and returned to the table

where she was still sitting, her head resting in her hand. "Come," she said, after a pause, with a lazy movement of her fingers outwards. The action, slight as it was, was wholly tempting as a call to idleness out there in the open.

"No, no," he answered in a hesitating way. "Crawley."

Suddenly her nostrils dilated. She stirred without moving from her place. She was some distance from the window and could only see from it the arching skies and leaves of the tree-tops very near, her strange eyes remained still. The scholar looked at her as if arrested by her mood, as if in a way frightened.

"He is coming," she said.

"Did you hear the bell?"

"No! . . . He is outside." Her eyes glittered as she spoke.

He waited.

CHAPTER III

In a few minutes the sound of the bell broke on the still air. Few ever rang this bell. It held its sway over the gate, an enormous, sonorous thing suggesting in its deep-toned reverberations a warning. Even timidly rung it gave forth a big sound, muffled perhaps, which added to its odd power of reaching the secret places of one's fear, the subconscious soul which is always, it would seem, prepared for disaster. The visitor these two were expecting was the only person, beside strangers, who used the old bell. This man dared never be anything but formal, he could not fraternise with his fellow-creatures, and out of some revenge, perhaps against a world that seemed to shrink from him, he took perpetual refuge in an authoritative importance.

The scholar and his daughter waited till the sound had ceased without changing their position of tension.

"You are right," said Malleson.

"The devil!" she said, and laughed.

He shivered though smiling back at her.

"We have denied his existence, haven't we?"

"Theories based on the most scientific proof become just nothing before some unexpected manifestation in nature," she threw out with some humour. "The-

oretically we deny evil, practically it is coming up our stairs."

She got up from her place suddenly.

"Oh! don't let's."

"Don't let's what?"

"Stay for the horror."

"I must, child." He thrust his hands in his pockets and moved to the window hurriedly, and then turned again to her with irresolution in his attitude. "Of course I must stay."

She caught his hand unexpectedly. "Don't give up this glorious afternoon to detestable business . . . and you know that you are quite ignorant about accounts, he will have the better of you. He will just have his way, nothing will be any different. If he is cheating you he will go on."

"I don't say he is doing that."

"He would do worse."

"We are mad to-day—Semiramis is in our blood—the unfortunate man is all right."

"Listen!"

"Well?"

"He is simply coming up the stairs."

"Do you expect him to come in at the window?"

"But the sun and the hay."

"Oh, Lord! I am not a child to want the hay."

She put her strong arms around him and forced him to the door.

"You do, you do."

"What are you about?"

"If only we get to the panel before he reaches it we are safe." She spoke under her breath.

"No, no," he protested, but somehow followed her. She had both his hands, what else could he do? They tiptoed down like miscreants, as the noise of their visitor's footsteps reached them slowly mounting.

"Quick, quick," she threw out, "he will turn the corner in a moment."

Half-way down the stairs was a narrow sliding panel, which led into the centre of the house; this stairway up to the immense attic gave immediately into the garden below. There was then a possibility of escape if this door could be reached in time.

The girl's eagerness communicated itself to her companion. They became like children. The sense of escape momentarily enthralled them. Neither of them knew quite from what they were running; the day was tempting, but that could hardly account for an instinctive sense within them both of the ominous horror in the sound of the agent's heavy tread up the winding stair—an unreasonable horror, but none the less possessing for that, and then, after all, to run away deliberately from any human being has always an element of strange adventure. The importance of a successful escape becomes exaggerated to amazing proportions,

and the unfortunate person escaped from an indescribable menace.

As they hastened through the panel she slipped it back and rested for a moment. They heard him pass and held their breath. Malleson hesitated as if to throw off such childishness and return, but the look of sheer horrified desperation in the girl's eyes made him laugh and follow on. She would not permit a halt now with so unreasonable a fugitive.

"He will chase us, the monster! You know he will. He always has his way." They went down another staircase and out into the garden by the front door, then round the house.

She intimated that they might be seen from the window, and they fled on for dear life towards the hayfield, a look of cunning joy on our scholar's face.

They had outwitted the devil!

Leaning against the half-completed haystack was a ladder, and wonderfully it seemed to them both that the thing was meant for them, was there to save them from a pursuit still possible. Though Malleson paused for a moment he knew he would go up that ladder; his hesitation was actuated by the prejudice of his years, the impossibility, in theory, of doing such an absurd thing.

"He is coming down the garden," said Rene, softly. "He will pass us here—we are hidden now by the trees—you must go up the ladder."

"How do you know he is in the garden?"

She did not turn her head. "Oh! he is there."

The scholar took her word for it and faced the ladder as he had faced the rest, as one in real danger, and ascended magnificently. The girl scaled the side of the stack as a boy might, with a leap and a hand-hold and a second leap, with even swifter agility perhaps. The top of the stack had not been thatched and was soft and most alluring, a downy bed of warm, scented stuff there under God's open—springy so that it was impossible to keep upright or even sit with dignity; to lie is the business, and once down the wonderful joy of it is ineffable as ever joy dare be. A peace pervades the senses, one sinks into the softness, one would crow if one could, just to give out to the world that one was in existence and safe from every kind of horror.

Crowing was not their affair, however, but a stifled whispering between the wisps of hay which was delicious too, wantoning in talk, simply because they should be silent, for surely enough their visitor was coming down the garden and making straight for the hayfield. They certainly could not be seen—had wriggled into the warm stuff to excellent result. They were both on their backs, the absurd creatures, with eyes on the moving white clouds and the distant hills; nothing very near was within view so that a kind of intoxication was theirs, as if they were balanced be-

tween earth and heaven, and this warm nest was the one thing in God's world!

Gradually our philosopher came to his senses.

"What in the name of all the saints, Rene, made you do such a wild thing? What will Crawley think of me, making an appointment and then . . ."

"Does it matter what he thinks?" she said, biting a wisp of hay with infinite satisfaction. "Are you not glad, grateful, ecstatically delighted to be here and not. . . . Hush! he's passing—I hear him." Her eyes glittered out of the straw, the smile had gone from her face; it looked pale and her nostrils dilated.

"You little wolf," said he, turning his head to look at her.

"Ah! but isn't the creature abominable!" she said quite seriously.

"Yes, but how you hate him! You seem to hate him with your body rather than your mind. Now I am quite indifferent to the wretch."

"Why *wretch* then?"

"Oh! granted he is an abomination, but why should we trouble?"

"That's my point! We don't here, do we?"

"Well! we have run away."

"Not at all! we have chosen to come out here into the sun to pay a visit to the clouds up here in our scented nest!"

"Oh! we didn't hurry, I suppose?"

"That was simply to enjoy ourselves."

"But I didn't enjoy it—I really felt pursued by some prehistoric monster."

"You call that indifference."

"It was physical, not mental."

"There we are then! We are alike, as you say. I hate physically—it seems so do you!"

"Yes, but I am not really frightened by the man—he's harmless enough!"

Upon this they both looked quite serious as if harmlessness were really the very last thought that entered their minds. They remained silent for some minutes, a procession of evil figures sweeping across their minds—the queer way that thoughts have of marshalling unexpected visions before one, as if after all thought were not one's own making, but the outcome of things seen in an inward vision from an outward source, then gradually upon their ears fell the interruption of voices talking just from under them.

"It is Hester and Evelyn and their friends," said Rene.

"The painter?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Have you seen him?"

"No."

"Where is he staying?"

"At the inn. He had no idea, it seems, that he was in our neighbourhood. He and Evelyn were great

friends. She thought he had quite forgotten her—until she saw him, then she knew he hadn't."

"Are they in love with one another?"

"I think so, only she says they are friends!"

"Pooh!" said Malleson, rather loudly.

"Hush! they will hear you."

"Would you like Evelyn and Hester to marry?"

"Yes."

"And me?"

"You!" he echoed.

"Why do you say *you* like that?"

"I don't know. Dear me!" he answered gravely. "You are such a child, you know, and so, so old too! I can't think of anyone good enough for you—but worse, I can't think of you as grown up."

"Nor I," she answered simply. "I don't think I could ever marry, and I don't think I shall ever grow up—I am old without it—it's only fair I should be always the other thing in compensation."

"Ancient One," he said, smiling at the view of her young, beautiful face through a lattice of hay, "see that this young man behaves himself—don't let him fall in love with you instead."

"I like being loved."

"Since when?"

"Since always. The others don't, you know—mother and Hester and Evelyn—that is how, I suppose, they fall suddenly into it and get married."

"And who have you loved so far?"

"Sometimes people, sometimes things, sometimes places! They think it indecorous."

"Whom do you love just now?"

"This stranger I have not seen."

"What of Evelyn?"

"Evelyn wants to marry him—I don't. I'll make him marry Evelyn."

The voices of the speakers beneath broke in upon their pause; they listened simply. Evelyn was speaking.

"You will want to paint Rene when you see her."

"I think not!" This answer had almost a comical finality. The voice that uttered it was beautiful. The seriousness of its tone, however, seemed in excess of its subject.

"Oh! you would!"

"Why?" came out in a crushing, cold challenge.

An apologetic "Oh!" with a little hurried explanation followed from two voices.

"She's supposed to be very pretty."

"I hate anything pretty."

"She's very fair."

"Worse!"

Rene crawled to the edge of the haystack and peered down. Her sisters, Evelyn and Hester, in pretty white gowns, sprigged with a pattern of flowers in blue, were seated on the ground close together; Evelyn's profile

was silhouetted against the stubble of the field like exquisitely modelled porcelain; her dark hair coiled in masses was very simply dressed. Both sisters had a look of exquisiteness, of feminine finish; their hands were delicate and small, and their movements graceful and conventional. From the view that Rene had of them they looked like little ladies strayed from a Watteau picture.

Near them sat the man whose voice had arrested her attention; he held a palette in his hand and was looking with half-closed eyes straight past the haystack. This then was Evelyn's friend! The girls had come across him accidentally in their walks, and recognised him as one of the men who had been staying at Lady Acres' on their last visit. He had given Evelyn some lessons in water-colour and they had, it would seem, struck up an unusual friendship; unusual because the man apparently was unusual, and his relationship with his fellow-creatures was never quite what was expected. People always wanted him greatly more than he ever wanted them. Men, women and children offered him a certain devotion. He appeared, however, to be signally indifferent to such manifestations of regard, at any rate, most part of his days, but there were times when some tender inclination would break over this calmness, a very boyish claim to sympathy—he would become both compassionate and pleading and obedient to wishes of the most trivial kind. In

conversation, when habitually he only threw in a subtle, annihilating phrase apt to leave both sides of a discussion high stranded as it were, or insulted, as the case might be, in these softer moments he found it possible to agree with a winning grace, making some simple utterance from a companion of a casual kind seem pregnant with subtlety and beauty. It must have been at these times that he gathered in, as we might say, his lovers.

The girls had heard he was a great painter, that he did not exhibit, that he was hardly known, excepting to a few, and these would pay any price for his work. He had imitators who had gained reputations. As he looked now with his blue, prominent eyes at the landscape so mysteriously flooded with light from the setting sun he was hardly thinking of what his companions were saying for all the decision of his utterances.

"Fair, fair!" he repeated absently, "horrid; that running light was fair though—one touch—one touch!" How it covered the haystack, etherialising everything into wonder—was it paintable? He remained suddenly very still. His eyes rested on those of a face all but buried, it would seem, in the hay, a wonderful face that suggested the reality of a Pagan religion, a religion of Nature's things, her woods and vines and corn—Pan must be near. Ah! he had not been wrong about this strange corner of England; where else could he see such

a face! Living mystery of all ages was looking at him out of those strange, almost red, glittering eyes; the artist of him traced the line of her nose, delicately long, square at the point, with dilating nostrils, a mouth all curves yet not laughing, red, just revealing a glimpse of teeth, hair pale almost as ivory, ropes of it growing low on the wide forehead above level brows. Behind the unsmiling countenance was a look of secret intention, of possible naughty malice, but it would give no warning of its presence. Inscrutable those eyes held him. There was little suggestion of sex in the face, like all very beautiful faces in youth it might have been a boy's or girl's—that, a good deal was its line, and its Greek quality, not the Greek of plastic gods, but the sudden life traceable in nymph and faun when simple nature had to be deified.

It was characteristic of the painter that he could quite forget his surroundings and sit still wondering in an absent way at the thing he saw, and lose himself in the thoughts that such an apparition had conjured up. The stack was loosening, and obviously towards him, then in a moment an avalanche of hay descended, his easel was upset and the canvas thrown violently to the ground.

A sense of absurd anger permeated his person. Seated at the foot of the haystack, in a kind of cutting of it, formed by the descent, was the dryad witch, or wolf, or any other kind of creature excepting woman,

looking up at him from under her tumbled pale hair.

"Oh! how angry you seem," she said in a voice that sounded like the low gurgling of water or the note of a wood-pigeon; it almost distracted him from his rage, but did not. He found himself listening for her to speak again with growing passion.

"It was heavenly, just tumbling with the hay—to go with what falls is delicious falling."

Yes, her voice was like the note of wood-pigeons!

"Wood-pigeon or not it is iniquitous," he said fiercely.

"What?"

"What you have done."

"What have I done?"

"My painting!" He threw the words at her.

"But—but I am very sorry."

"That is of no consequence to me!"

"Oh! you are really angry, and only over a sketch."

"I happen to think a sketch more valuable than anything else."

"I might have annihilated one of my sisters, for instance."

"That would have mattered in the long run less."

"Oh!"

"A work of art influences and makes happy thousands of human beings for hundreds of years; a human

being, an idle one, has a lifetime and probably affects no one unless to pester."

"Isn't it mysterious!" she murmured as if they had known each other for all time.

So that for a moment the heat of his anger was subdued, but her very reflectiveness again stirred up his wrath.

"You destroyed it to amuse yourself."

"Oh! I didn't mean to."

"As if it matters what you meant! It is the thing done that matters."

She pushed back the coil of hair from her forehead.

"Can't you forget your work for a little moment and enjoy the—the—" She wanted to say "hay" but somehow put in "sun."

"But that was what I was doing and you have taken it all away."

"It may not be hurt," she said, and moved to lift the canvas from the ground. He made no attempt to help her but watched her gravely. She handled it with care. "I get angry, you know, in the sort of way that you are, only I get much worse—after all, you can do another."

"Only God can repeat a sunset," he said fiercely.

"What am I to do to make you not angry?" Then she stopped: "Why, there's nothing on the canvas!—you hadn't begun! . . ."

He said nothing, still looking gravely at her.

"Decidedly you are the worst-tempered person I have ever met."

"You destroyed the idea," he said gently. He was standing quite near her now and she noticed how suddenly kind his eyes became. They remained silent for some moments.

"You are very beautiful," he said.

CHAPTER IV

MEANWHILE our scholar, conscious of the stranger's presence, descended by means of the ladder on the other side and wandered down the hill into the sunset. He was always nervous of many people together, even of his own family in numbers, and greatly so if a stranger were with them. He was, nevertheless, extremely interested in what he had heard of Mark Grey; his wife had spoken of him as well as Rene, and he found himself thinking that it would be a good thing if this young man married Evelyn—he would like his girls to marry. In his thoughts he was quite intimate with the painter, would have been pleased to talk to him of Rubens and Hogarth—masters he very much admired—and he hoped that on some near day he would see those modern efforts so much praised; meanwhile he was wholly shy of him. Moreover, were he to meet him just now he himself would probably say something he should not—something that would make him blush afterwards: such as—*that he did hope Evelyn would accept him,* when after all the man may not have made any statement with regard to proposing. But in truth it was an instinct with him to avoid people; he did not love his wife and children less because he preferred, on the whole, to live his life more or less apart—not

always to be spoken to on casual meetings or counted as a necessary presence at luncheons. He could not, for instance, talk small-talk; he was not above it, he was in a sense, he felt, below it, he failed to spontaneously attain the exact degree of separating cause and effect. A wet day did not suggest to him the idea that it was tiresome—that one could not go out, that somebody's clothes would get soaked, but the notion of the beauty of just rain—of its wondrous beneficence and its way of re-colouring the world on its departure. Or if a cup were broken—he could not consider the cup in relation to the fact of replacing it, but could only experience a sense of the possible breaking of more important quantities in the world, the unexpected sudden devastation that can destroy the little brittle thing, or a world balanced so strangely in a palpitating universe: or again merely the spiritual breaking of relations as potent as this natural manifestation seemingly so useless. If the delinquencies of a dismissed servant were being discussed he had a sneaking desire to go to the back door and tell the man that it was all right. If he were caught by a caller, a plain, middle-aged person trussed in best apparel, who might possibly be wearing false hair, it was all he could do not to say, "I am so interested, madam, in your hair! Is it not a peculiar sensation walking about with a dead person's property? Is it quite cricket?" Of course he never said these things. He spoke courteously and beautifully to all

people, and was given credit for profound and serious speculation when he looked absently into the eyes of men and women and was puzzling over their acquired tricks.

Yet matrimony had remained with this man the wonderful relationship it had seemed to him in his boy's heart when he had learnt first the amazing truth that a beautiful, tender girl could be his—his so entirely. The sense of the sacredness of the tie had never left him. He did not grow commonly used to it. He was a keeper of the sanctuary rather than the master of a possession somewhere described as an item with chattels. Before his elder daughters, their little girls Hester and Evelyn, sheer wonder had kept him from familiarity. That those dainty, conventional little persons were his he was never really tired of telling himself. He had watched them times enough (from a window unseen) going to church in delightful muslin and ribbons, so stiff and sedate, a little book held in hand, Hester perhaps admonishing Evelyn so adorably for some trivial laxity of attitude! And they wore bows—pink and blue bows! Our scholar found these absurdities simply entrancing. Rene in her early years he recognised as his comrade, his from the start, and all but winked at her before the law of her elders. On an occasion when she was still an infant he had, with a splendid daring, stolen her from the nursery when none were looking and bore her off to the great attic,

to set her at looking through a microscope. He blushed when he was discovered, and delightfully enough she did too; they shared a secret shame at the adventure and were of course henceforth pals. He would never have dared such an escapade with Hester or Evelyn, yet he adored the very attitude in them that made it impossible. As time went on Rene sided with him in a mutual understanding that she was with him, in a sense, an inferior being. Had she been a boy things might have gone on in this simple way, because as a boy she would not have come in contact with too narrow views. In the intimate relations of women with one another, and especially of elder sisters and a mother over a young girl, petty tyranny is likely to weigh very heavily, all the more that the child had a wonderful brain. It was constantly found not right that she should think as she thought, do as she did, and above all express too decided an opinion; a learned man like her father was one thing, the wonder of her young wisdom was only revolting, out of place—to be suppressed. The conventionality which astonished and amused Malleson—he had declared to her, with infinite glee, that it was Assyrian—" it leaps the centuries from then till now "—kept her in unbearable chains. She suffered continually, passionately.

" Ah! child, child, you must not feel things so! Your hands are trembling, what now? " he asked her times enough.

"But the injustice!" she cried, with blazing eyes. She was so young.

"All conventions become unjust."

"But the lies."

"Lies!" What could he answer? Of course they lied—were there any parents, teachers, elder brothers and sisters in the world over who did not in a moment of tussle with such a rebel as this Rene lie? Were there any tyrants, masters, prime ministers, governments the world over who did not? And this child shook like a leaf because her mother and sisters had prevaricated. They, the dear things, what else could they do against her! She was so strong in her single purpose, but it was quite dreadful to see her suffer so. "You crucify yourself, you know," he told her. "You must not, you must not. The world is not just, the world is not honest, the world is a liar, but it always means well," and the reassuring simile twisted his beautiful mouth.

"If I could only be like them," she said.

"But you can't . . . you don't wear bows!"

No, she did not wear bows! Therein was a vast amount of significance—bows are not a question of fashion but of temperament! He thought of this now as he wandered down the hill, in thinking of Evelyn who did so delightfully wear bows, who was so pretty, so dainty, and had apparently won the painter man's heart. Well, the painter man had not seen Rene in her

white monk's dress, with her boy's limbs and her tumbled pale hair shadowing her mysterious eyes. Dear! dear! dear! what if this shameful Rene! He could but smile as he thought; the smile had lurked about his mouth ever since they had made this absurd retreat, and now it faded and an anxious expression hovered over it as the smile had, never quite getting possession of his countenance. This characteristic was perhaps the sweetness of his face; no emotion successfully dominated it, for a certain serenity, that of the scholar, we think, looked out from behind transient expressions, even from behind the enduring sadness of his eyes. It had not been quite from the horrible man that he had fled, or entirely because of the suave summer afternoon and the insistence of Rene; with these influences was a latent notion that his visitor was bringing bad news concerning money matters. A sense of apprehension was upon him and for some unaccountable reason he had run from it. . . . Crawley had been the symbol of trouble. He knew, of course, that he had in no sense escaped from trouble, but he had put it from him for a few brief hours; something beyond his own reason had awakened in him an imperious desire to have these brief sunlit hours.

Crawley would certainly turn up again, thinking that he had mistaken the time mentioned—yes, Crawley would come! It was greatly because he knew that he must see the man that he had thrown him temporarily

overboard as it were. This procrastination had always been his weakness; he shunned the details of business and still more the necessity—if he did go into matters scrupulously—of telling Crawley that he was a scoundrel and possibly a robber to boot!

If you have permitted a man to dip his hands into your pockets with impunity for thirty years it is a little difficult, because more is going than you can afford, to call out suddenly *thief*. Of course, he had not always thought him that. It is not easy to believe in the dishonesty of a person whom you constantly see, who is a gentleman and, after all, in a really secure position. On the contrary, in affairs he had thought him an honest enough bailiff; that he was something of a lawyer made it seem all so right that he should continue to manage the place on Malleson's own succession at the death of his elder brother.

To dislike Crawley was part of the tradition of the shire, to entrust him with your affairs seemed to be a settled custom in the neighbourhood. He was Lord M——'s agent for the immense surrounding estates, and Malleson felt that only some monstrous personal speculation could have made it necessary for the man to mishandle things as evidently of late years he had begun to do; unless indeed the creature was fundamentally dishonest, in which case human nature and not circumstances were responsible. Crawley really did affect one as being a beast of any horrid capacity if

one once set merely to take his measure. He most successfully conveyed to one his power for evil, but hitherto—to Malleson at any rate—big and awful evil seemed to be his atmosphere, some crookedness of soul that was outside daily affairs. He had strength and, oddly, suggested a certain safety in his protection; one might be swallowed whole by the giant, but meanwhile the feeling was that the giant would at any rate protect one from various pigmies.

The time had come, however, when he must look into things. His income had been too absurdly diminished—something must be wrong somewhere.

Of course his main capital was safe enough, and not in Crawley's hands, the M—— Bank managed that, an old country firm. This feeling of imminent disaster was absurd, a mere nagging of the imagination thrust suddenly into the concrete affairs of business to which it was unused! Gradually as he walked the feeling of uneasiness, of the unexpected on his heels, as it were, subsided; the magic of the afternoon in the wood he had reached became paramount and absorbing. A very sweet peace was here: a still silence was present, so that the movements of small things became audible, rustlings here and there, and then a sudden liquid thrill of a bird as if all the other feathered things were listening to some special message, to be followed by an uninterrupted silence again! A squirrel scuttled across the path, and the lowering sun made everything col-

oured and glittering; he was inclined to repeat the old fairy story adage—The trunks of the trees were *real* silver and the leaves were glistening emeralds and the paths were *all* gold, and the creatures about were tame and were not afraid. Whimsically he told himself that it was all better even than real gold and silver. Oh! they had their way of hitting a moral, these ancient story-tellers—the sun gold was always the *real gold* to them.

He wandered on, drinking in the peace of things and all the subtle suggestions Nature will at times throw out to him who is pure of spirit, watching the beautiful things we all watch (even who are not), when going alone through a wood: the lovely trellis work of leaves that throw their purple patterns in shadows across the paths; the streaks of sky seen through the branches; a starry flower, unexpected and bold like a sentinel, upon the mossy footway; the swish of birds' wings as they fly low through the corridors of their home; the gurgling of a streamlet tumbling over stones or under those hooded with ivy; the great dragon-fly sailing down its miniature course past the gauzy webs spiders have woven, scintillating purple and silver, their hunchback occupants invisible.

At last he emerged into the open, the horizon seen curved in a half-circle against the sky. From the intimacy and kindness of the woods, to the majesty of space, the palpitating immensity of the heavens over

the still earth brought the pulses to a quicker beat. There were not little noises here, only the strange murmur of the far-reaching plains. He walked up the hill, back across some fields to where he had left the others. The sun was now very low, actually dipping beneath the horizon; grey shadows were rising everywhere to mingle with the copper of the light from the sun, rendering all things unsubstantial to the eye. The hayfield looked like a place in a dream. The figures of his daughters were flitting to and fro like shadows. The hay was being tossed between them in some wild game, begun doubtless passively enough in quiet demureness by Hester and Evelyn, with little smiles on their tender faces, increasing to a veritable frenzy at last as the scent of the hay and the effect of sunset and Rene's maddest racing intoxicates their senses to the seriousness and joy and passion of such a stampede—the mænad uppermost in them for a brief hour. Their hair had become loosened and streamed to the wind; their gauzy gowns, as they ran, pressed against their young figures, silhouetting their virgin curves; their loose sleeves slipped aside revealing the gleam of flesh. The painter, looking like a young Dionysus, was beset by these wild dryads, whose white arms held the fragrant hay in annihilating avalanches. Rene was a possessed creature; she raced and doubled and furled her burden like nothing human. As she passed near, the old scholar caught the glitter of her eyes. Dionysus

pursued with an apparent rage in his fleetness, and the lack of laughter had become the moment's wonder.

Malleson passed, unseen by them, back towards the house, the scent of the tossed hay in his nostrils and the vision of Rene pursued by the young god speeding in and out of the shadows very present.

He looked once back and saw that the game was over and that they were loitering in the now shadowy field. Suddenly a young voice broke on the still air, a girl's voice; the notes rose into the pale sky of the twilight, whose faint stars were beginning to glimmer, enthralling, tender.

Who could sing like that?

He came upon a little figure whose hands were busy cleaning silver at the door of some back premises; quite a child she looked, her head lifted, revealing a white slender throat, her mouth rounded for her song. Surely a new little maid who had not learnt that she must not sing to the skies over her work for the rest of her young years, and indeed for all the years of her life. Oh! she would learn it—part of the business of service—you mustn't sing, you know it is not . . .

The round eyes will look startled when she hears the mandate, and the next time a song rises in her heart she will stifle it—part of learning her duties, this, to her patrons.

What a voice! What a wondrous voice, thinks the scholar, and passes, forgetful to hush it.

He found himself returning to the foot of the stairs with the intention of going up to the room he had quitted in such absurd haste. He had no reason for doing so; on the contrary, it was his habit to go to the library at this hour when he found his wife, a slight figure seated in a high-backed chair amongst the countless rows of books, her hands, like white flowers, resting for the nonce idle in her lap in a kind of ceremonious waiting behind the silver-laden tea-table not yet cleared, a look of expectancy in her eyes as Malleson entered, or her girls, just for that half-hour of inconsequent talk, when the evening post was expected to and brought something of the great world into the quiet of Donnington.

No, he would climb the stairs again. He felt that necessity one experiences to go into the room in which a visitor has penetrated during one's absence. He had, moreover, done something absurd; there was an obligation almost to get back to himself as it were—something too of a penitential return from the wondrous afternoon, a wanton hour, the pleasure of which was still perceptibly pricking in his veins. What might not happen! A desire did actually lurk within him to return to that field, carrying the little songstress with him, and assail the others resting under the stars into a veritable onslaught of battle—an orgy of hay-throwing and capering. Even they had not been as mad as he could be!—ample need then that he should get a

proper balance of things again, the young spirit of him settle back into its fleshly bag of bones which carried too many years for such escapades, and a weak heart to boot! Absurd muscle that tyrannised over the body, and was with him at any rate to give the signal for the changing of this old coat—the signal for the stepping into the eternal life or into nothingness! If the spirit did not grow old how could it die? And his spirit was not old—death must be the ultimate decay of the whole. Oh! he had seen the spirit decay before even the body. Did some spirits then prove inadequate? and was not that the real meaning of eternal death?

He threw back the door of the attic and stood still for a moment on the threshold, scenting as it were the presence of the man who had been in the room during his absence. From the many-paned great window, which extended almost the whole width of the room, a pale light streamed in; the leaves of a tree overshadowing the house looked dark and flicked against the panes; close things from Mother Earth, yet framing the patch of heavens beyond, in which glittered the wonder of a star. The light fell unexpectedly upon a crucifix which hung in an habitually dark corner. The figure upon it in no way appeared tortured, whilst so wonderfully symbolising the presence of suffering. He thought suddenly of the arrested song of Phœbe, the little maid, and the look of pain he surprised at times in Rene's eyes when she was wistfully looking down the

corridors of the past, or pursuing its chronicles in which were carelessly detailed the sufferings of man.

His eyes moved from the white Christ to the table, on which he at once perceived a folded newspaper. Its ugly thickness was a grey blot among the creamy papers. He crossed the room and picked the thing up uneasily. A red mark scored the margin of the paragraph uppermost, and the ink seemed like a streak of blood, evidently scrawled with a thick quill, ending in a blot.

CHAPTER V

He read the headline several times without taking in its meaning, at any rate relative to himself. Its entire unexpectedness made it difficult to grasp anything at first but the isolated statement, and when a consciousness of its purport did come, it came with monstrous rush, so incapable is the brain of being forewarned; the weight of a world seemed to press in his blood, and overwhelming forces besieged his feebly-pulsing heart. He felt faint and sick and waited, with the patience those afflicted with bodily weakness so wonderfully possess, till the physical crisis passed. He murmured the name of his wife and moved towards the door as if to go to her, then he hesitated and finally turned back. She need not know yet. One didn't realise quite how one stood: he re-read the headline.

Failure of Osborn's Bank. All his capital was in this firm. The sensational little word *ruin* danced before his eyes fantastically. It was a word you read in fiction or spoke of on rare occasions with regard generally to some remote person, news of whose failure reached you with the rest of the world's affairs, never conceivable that it could refer to one's self. It was not possible to be ruined without having had any finger in the disaster—neither speculation nor waste!—yet it

was so. The gods simply stretched out their hands and took all—that was what ruin meant.

They were to be beggars, his wife, his girls, Rene! The absoluteness of this was impossible to accept so that the thought needed to be re-stated to himself over and over again. They would be dependent then upon friends! What could he make? He glanced at his papers and appraised their material value. They were worthless—a few sovereigns from a quarterly, an expensive book that would bring in little enough. And other work! What other work could he undertake? For some moments of pondering his thoughts ran quietly on this. His age! He was sixty—and his health, this organ called a heart that threatened him hourly—what dare he undertake! He re-read the paragraph slowly through, and when he had finished he folded the paper carefully up and replaced it just where it had lain. Awful, stupefying, grotesque! that such a thing could happen. The doors of the bank had been closed the day before, and over the county the horrid news had made its way—ruin to himself and to hundreds of men and women! His mind wandered off, he lived the pain for the moment of others, and had to come back with a shock to the consciousness that he was actually a partaker of all the misery. Poverty is an unrealisable quantity to one who has never experienced it. This is the reason of half the horror in the world and all its peace. We could not be at peace were we

able to realise the suffering of one destitute person, one starving man, one hungry pregnant woman, much less the countless numbers of such in our great cities.

Destitution, the word took shape before Malleson's mind an ugly enough presence. No, that would not happen! He calculated his lesser resources—there would be something left in the end—rents in the hands of Crawley! An odd sensation took possession of him. They had run away from Crawley that very afternoon! He had sent for him to examine the year's accounts; he had neglected things, knew that Crawley was not wholly to be trusted, knew he must overlook matters more carefully, and then he had shirked the interview with wanton persistence. They had run away, not, it would seem, after all, from the man as they had supposed, but from this— He eyed the horrid paper. This wonderful afternoon had been given him first!

Well! there were things still to be looked into. Some land had been sold six months previously; some timber too had been cut; Donnington and the reduced estate remained. Something could surely be saved—Crawley! . . . But each time that his thoughts met this man they remained still and paralysed. How had Crawley managed things? Before his knowledge of this bank failure, had he not felt that the agent was shamefully mismanaging if not robbing him? What would be his statement? For thirty years he had had the control of Donnington. He was Lord M——'s agent, the only

lawyer of the county, and a scoundrel to boot! Why, in spite of this, everyone's affairs were in his hands it was difficult to understand, yet it was the fact; one can conceive it simply that he was the man there, the secret, doubtless, of most tyrants' power—just to be rooted like some tree in such and such a commanding position. Nothing short of a revolution can dislodge the pettiest of potentates! It is the nature of man to submit to authority; much as he may despise the personality of his ruler, he always and most wonderfully gives his adherence to the powers that are. In no other way can the submission of whole nations to some mad despot in the past be accounted for, or the amazing tolerance in the nineteenth century of a line of hereditary legislature.

Malleson assured himself that there must be some small income left to them; nevertheless, doubts assailed him, an *if* intervened. *If* the worst were to happen! What then? He was sixty and . . .

His hands and feet became very cold as he sat brooding: awful possibilities pushed themselves before his consideration, and other pictures, like scenes in a dream, were enacted before his mind's vision. The day had waned; only the light of the stars entered the shadowy room and he dared not move. He could not think; interruption by physical effort was impossible. At last he heard the soft patter up the stairs, and he knew that Rene was coming. Still he could not move. . . . It

was so absurd . . . so preposterous, to be left with nothing! Rene was coming, should he tell her—she would find it out—ah! the child, it was good to hear her coming.

"Why, father, what are you doing in the dark?" She halted. "Oh! the stars, the stars—look, the whole heaven is ablaze!"

"Stars!" he exclaimed, arrested before the flood of light from the window.

"Look how they glimmer over the earth! I would like to go out and race to the end of the world! . . . But why haven't you come down to supper? We thought that you were coming every moment and then we had a fight."

"A fight!"

"They wanted to stop the new little maid from singing over her work out in the shed. They said it wasn't usual for maids to sing so as they could be heard. I said I thought it delightful getting her voice thrown in for such low wages, and then we fought. . . . At last it was settled definitely that she was not to be permitted to sing!"

"Poor little girl!"

"Ah! then you side with me . . . ?"

"Rene!"

"Why, what is it? How strange you look! What has happened? . . . You are ill?"

"I am tired!"

"Shall I bring you some supper up here?"

"No. . . . Rene, Crawley came, you know!"

"Ah! you are worrying over Crawley. It doesn't matter—you can see him to-morrow."

"The stopping of song is surely a kind of law," he answered absently.

"What do you mean?"

"I suppose it is only fair that we who expect such submission should sometimes, too, have our singing stopped." He raised his head. . . . "Oh! you are right about the stars, child! Child, how wonderful they are! I had not looked, I was thinking—Rene, what can anything matter? . . . Open the window."

Rene opened the casement to lean out. "Listen," she said, "she is singing again, they have not told her yet."

"I will not have them stop her . . . tell the girls —I do not wish it—I forbid them."

He closed his eyes. Rene, turning from the window, saw again that there was something amiss with her father. She stooped over him.

"Is your heart bad to-night?"

"Yes," he answered absently, "that's it."

"I am going to fetch you some supper here—soup and wine."

"Very well."

When she had gone he tried to move but fell back. The interruption of her coming had kept his thoughts

stationary in a kind of bewildered obeisance though a queer undercurrent of miserable suggestions eddied about his anxiousness, and the moment he was alone he had to meet again the shock of realisation.

He was glad when she returned: he wanted immensely the warm soup, since she had mentioned it, and the wine. His fingers shook as he raised the glass to his lips. Rene watched him with concern: she no longer looked at the stars. She knew that something had happened, something that had made her father suffer, and she sat still and rigid with an alert dumb patience, yet ready—he saw that, and wondered in his heart at the beauty of her—ready to assail his enemies with her life if need be. He watched her light the big lamp that hung over the table with its opaque green glass shade. The warm flood of yellow rays spreading out from under it was comforting. Her slim white hands moved dexterously among the papers to make room for the little tray of food.

The soup warmed him, and the wine sent his blood more steadily through his veins, his beating pulses began to calm, and the reaction was pleasant; the body of him had suffered through his mind too much this past hour, and now the body must be at ease against any odds. "After all," and he smiled at Rene, "the beast left his sting. Do you think that was why we had to run away—we felt that he was going to sting? One always suspects it of him—no other man than

Crawley would have broken such news so brutally. What is it in the awful man that makes him do such things? Do you think that he hates the human race?" He looked at his daughter with the whimsical question peering from his eyes, seeking, as he always did with her, the answer to his wit, but he met the challenge in the gravity of her expression. She did not respond and he turned with a sigh back to the concrete aspect of things.

"Tell me what has happened," she said.

"I do not know why I should keep it from you, Rene. You will not mind quite in the same way as the others. It's a question of money."

"Money!"—there was relief in her tone.

"It's simply all gone!"

"Crawley!" she said with raised eyebrows.

"No," he returned, rather as if after all that were much more the likely thing. "The bank."

"Has it failed?"

"Stopped payment yesterday."

She sat very quiet.

"What will it mean?"

He got up at last and paced the room. It was easier to look at the thing now someone else knew besides himself. Confidence flowed back. He felt that matters could not be so bad as he had feared.

"There must really be something," he said. "Crawley had the management of the estate—there are things

due—some timber was to be sold, and the fields you know next to Lord M——'s farm. It will be little enough, of course, but something to go on with, but I must see him first thing to-morrow. We must send the boy over with a note—and the others must know nothing about it yet."

"Did he write this to you?"

"No, just left that." He threw a glance towards the paper. She saw the scored passage in red ink and stood still looking at it.

"We are then practically ruined?"

"We are practically ruined," he answered, stopping in his walk and looking at her as if her saying the thing brought a kind of strength to him.

She remained silent and he did not move.

"What are you thinking of?" he said.

"I was thinking I would not mind if we had to live in a tree . . . but you others!"

"Me! Do you think I would mind the tree?"

"No," she answered, quite seriously, "you and I wouldn't mind the tree, but mother and Hester and Evelyn."

"I know, I know"—he turned and continued his pacing—"that is the whole matter."

"And this painter man of Evelyn's," she went on.

"Oh, he! I should have thought that he and Evelyn—"

"You are wrong, he wants a world of gold."

"Good heavens! I understood that he was the most unworldly, bread-and-water hermit and anarchist combined, with property of his own."

"That may be, but nothing will ever be enough for him; he ignores what is ugly with a cold resentment."

"You do not like him."

"Yes, I like him."

"Do you think that Evelyn cares for him?"

"They were six weeks together—they are friends. She is reserved—"

"Well! there is no money." He sat down. "He must go, Rene, that is all, and we must fight the business as best we can. . . ." He paused. "Do you mean that he is a fortune-hunter?"

"No, not that in the least. It is difficult to explain—he must have the earth and the stars and the moon or nothing, and he rather loves nothing. He would not stir a hand to gain the universe."

"He does not love Evelyn then?"

"I think he does, but it will be no use now."

"You have learnt all this in an afternoon?"

"He is the most unaffected man one has ever met—one must know him at once or never. . . . He has a most beautiful dog," she said unexpectedly.

"Dog," he repeated, with the interest persons invariably take in outside, perhaps trivial, subjects when the mind is overburdened with some trouble that is very present—a respite as it were between deeper consid-

erations, the drinking of cold water at a breath taking.

"A retriever with a dusky coat that is the softest I have ever touched, and the look in his eyes that isn't quite thoroughbred, a kind of apology for his square nose that brings you to his feet. His name is Doone."

"Master and dog then are interesting?"

She laughed; they were both thinking about ruin and they both laughed; but the smile faded on their faces prematurely, their eyes wandered and returned to meet one another's serious again.

"We may have to leave Donnington," he said suddenly.

"It will be hard on mother."

"That's it, that's it—we could all manage, even my little girls." It was his habit to speak of his elder daughters in this way; his first children, so near an age, remained always the wonder firstborn are to parents. Rene was something of his own absurd self and understood entirely what he meant when he spoke of his *little girls*.

"We must say nothing about it to anyone yet . . . till I see Crawley I don't know how we stand. I must write a note to him now—"

CHAPTER VI

As Rene closed the door upon her father and went slowly downstairs she experienced that sense of new birth which invariably animates a soul suddenly confronted by disaster; there was to be a trimming of her sails, as it were, to face the storm. Her whole person was permeated by an active consciousness, a new understanding, not of special things but of everything. She was to be ready then; and for what? . . . Her mental vision carried nothing distinct, but physically hurried messengers beat through her blood for some necessary preparedness. Life was knocking at the door. Spirit and matter were coalescing, that wonderful marriage that turns the youth to man and the child to woman.

She had been in the brief interval brought up suddenly face to face with the mysterious question of actual livelihood. . . . From earliest childhood she had had a passionate pity for the poor. She had nosed into economics, searched for some reasonable explanation for the awful misery of such a number of men and women. She had gone through the squalid districts of London with her father—had lain whole nights wide-eyed staring at darkness with fear and horror when the revelation of the wanton's trade in streets at night had been told her by a gossiping landlady in the se-

questered lodgings in which she had stayed with her father whilst he attended some university conference; for among the lower classes these things are not hidden from the young. How can they be? Little girls have to be put on their guard against the great *beast* since they have to live where he nests, and they are not less innocent for that. Those round-eyed imps, curly bare heads we stumble on in these poorer quarters, have a knowledge of depths that would make a grown man shudder even to peer into, but the little girls remain undefiled. They have a philosophy of simplicity and humour, and the good and evil within them come out not more nor less when they pass the threshold of man- and womanhood. The good landlady found nothing wrong in explaining to this young lady life, and was amazed to see her cry and pour out questions that simply meant—"Can nothing be done?—Can we now do nothing?"

"Do anything?" had exclaimed the stupefied woman. "Do anything? Why, my poor innocent, haven't you read the Scriptures?—isn't it even there? It's gone on all that time since, and Lord knows," added the queer creature, with a reflective appreciation, "how long before!"

Who could answer this woman's thesis!

"It's man's muddling," she finished with some good intention at consolation.

All these considerations, however keenly felt, had

been outside her life—part in a way of the philosophic study she pursued with her father; these, probably shorn of their first horror, had become after all problems with others, study to be unravelled speculatively: now a definite experience was to be hers which was, in a sense, part of all that, its advent brought these things sweeping before her mind's understanding that she might know they were real, the active, moving thing. Men and women did starve, women did sell their flesh for life; little children suffer ill-treatment, irreparable circumstances everywhere weigh upon humanity to destruction. Not definitely did the details of these things present themselves to her, but in a conglomerate diffused presence to her soul, the symbol of all pain pressing as it must when the *human* is attacked by special sorrow.

Not only was her father in trouble, but there was trouble ahead, something not yet perceived to be overcome; her mental vision became obscured by giant factors that portended evil. She endeavoured to bring it all to a rational order, to a simple realisation. They were perhaps to meet want—and she therefore must do something, but what? Her elder sisters? Well! no, that could not be—they were not meant to work; she found them younger than herself and persons the world must protect. That real privation could come to her mother, to them, was unthinkable, and it seemed that it was not in these considerations that the pending

game of tragedy lay. From head to toe her body tingled with sensations alternating between shocks caused by thought of the possible misery to come and a new self-discipline against giving way. In every cell of her physique was being born saving life power. These two forces, fear and resistance, in a manner stunned her; moral in essence they seemed to become physical, and physically she had to carry them.

She reached the foot of the stairs and paused. The hall had not been lit up, a dim reflection crept in here and there, its large squareness was bathed in shadows that were thrown by big furniture, there was an atmosphere of shelter and warmth; through an open door she caught a glimpse of James, the butler, carrying a lighted taper, which threw up the cameo type of his delicate thin features, aquiline and reserved, his clinging dress coat emphasising the stoop of his shoulders and the propriety of the hour. James was everything in their household at different times of day: boots in the early morning, valet a little later, assistant gardener at midday, on occasions coachman when the old laudau was wheeled out of the stables and put into the family harness; in the evening he was all that a butler should be. Could she conceive for a moment their home life at all without their old friend James?

Nothing was to be said, then, to the others. She was naturally reserved but not secretive, and this was

a new difficulty, a shield she must carry that would press heavily. She could be silent but she knew nothing of simulation. Across the reflectiveness of her eyes came a more immediate troubled look as she heard the gay voices of Hester and Evelyn: Evelyn was laughing, a clear, ingenuous laugh beautiful to hear. Who would dare interrupt such a sound with horrid news? Yet uninterrupted the laugh could only have its moment. Even untold the news was a fact; surely it would enter the room with her and they would know however much she tried not to speak. It was difficult to turn the handle of the door.

She went in softly and stood silent on the threshold. They would see that something had happened, and what could she say? She felt her hands tremble but no one took any notice of her. The lamps had not been lit, only the candles, which shed a soft light over the polished table, on which dessert was placed in big silver bowls and bright green plates formed in the shape of leaves. The girls still wore their sprigged muslins. Their pretty hair, no longer hidden by the shady hats, was tied with a knot of ribbon; this caught the light, their fair faces were flushed, their eyes suffused with the softness common to those of young girls in the presence of a visitor who had been delightful and had stayed in an intimate way till so late. Such a happening was rare. There were so few people who came to see them, and their delicate happiness permeated the

room, filled the atmosphere, as it were, and reached the young man seated with them.

It was characteristic of him that he won people always in this way, out of his very shyness, his aloofness; he accepted more naturally the hospitality offered when unexpected. They must take him altogether or not at all, actually must want him very sincerely before he would move a step towards friendship. He entirely shunned social gatherings; and a kind of sublime egotism kept him free from touch with all the infesting gadflies of humanity who perpetually seek new acquaintances. His drooping eyelids, his habitual silence and monosyllabic speech deceived these happy hunters, or frightened them away, so that the more beautiful relationship with his fellow-creatures was possible. There is perhaps no barrier to such communion as that of Society—the loneliness of the really social persons must be awful. Happily they are unaware of the cause of their isolation and hasten on to new crowds to appease their absurd hunger; but we wander . . .

Rene stood in the shadowy room and she tried to reconcile the two things, their quiet happiness here and the pain she had come from, which was the real thing. Ought she not to shout out to them that he—up there was bearing it all alone, and bearing it for their sakes. She was young and it was hard not to speak.

"He is not coming down then?" her mother murmured, without raising her head.

"No, no," said Rene, hastily, "he wants to go on."

At the sound of her voice the young painter looked up, and suddenly rose as if he would offer his chair. She perceived, however, that he had guessed that something had happened and for a moment she was comforted. It was so lonely to keep it back from everyone. This stranger could not matter, and the kindness of his eyes was like some healing balm.

"He's all right, Rene?" Mrs. Malleson questioned, with no sense of anxiety. It was quite an ordinary occurrence for her husband to remain late over his work.

"Oh! yes . . ." Her lips trembled, suddenly the painter came between her and the others.

"You are tired," he said quietly, "do sit down."

She slipped into a chair near the door, their eyes met.

"Oh! keep them happy," she said, and she smiled the winsome boyish smile that was so mysterious and beautiful; and this reminded him suddenly of the hay and the laughing face peering down at him with serious eyes, only now she was very pale. They had romped wildly enough in the deepening twilight, her frolic had become almost a passion; both surely had tasted something of primitive life, of elemental unity; they had ceased to laugh in the wild race, her eyes had gleamed at him, odd flames, and he had felt his heart beating to suffocation. Momentary madness had been upon him. Had he reached her he would have crushed her all but to death, but she had eluded him, and instead the little

figure of Evelyn was in his clasp. He had panted as he held her, but the soft muslin-frocked figure moving gently from his hands had sobered him. With an artist's sensibility to impressions the flower-like fragility of Evelyn reached his tenderness—the witch-girl had gone. . . . Then later at table had been the odd skirmish between Mrs. Malleson and her about the singing of a maid. He had heard the beautiful little voice and wondered at these gracious women's extraordinary attitude of mind, and the passionate pleading from the girl's lips for no interference. Why did she care? She had spoken wonderfully and he had seen at once that what she had said had been of no avail: the delicate lineament of his hostess's face had quivered merely under a sense of disturbed propriety. She perceived only queerness in her youngest daughter's revolt and was annoyed in a patient way. Once her eyes sought his for some acquiescence to her point, but he had lost the point in a conflicting sympathy for temperaments so different. He was for Rene because of her passion, he was for the others because of their hurt sensitiveness; wrong possibly, but a refinement of a kind, and he was for the creature whose voice, like a nightingale's, had soared upwards to the dim heavens in the wonderful twilight. They named her Phœbe, and like the song the name reached his ego, he became lost in thinking of the tender name. "Was she really called Phœbe?" he said absently.

Then Rene had slipped away and he had forgotten her in the shadowy room and under the charm of a flowing harmony, place and persons one in their effect upon him. The Georgian room was unusual and without any modern interruptions, any conscious effort at taste. Everything had been as it was for generations, even the way different objects, no longer used in modern rooms, were placed. The women spoke softly, the acerbity of their dissatisfaction had gone, they lured him to talk who was no talker, the long silence fell between them without any effect of mattering. Twilight had deepened, the stars had gradually heaped themselves into banks and poured a cold light over the earth, making the candles on the polished table throw a warm glow over everything. He had found his eyes resting on Evelyn's, and then Rene had come, a swift interruption like the beating of a bird's wings in tumultuous flight on a quiet air. Her white face gleamed out against the dark panelling of the wall, a frightened look hovered in her eyes to be suddenly screened by an effort that at any rate must shelter her from any possible questioning. The mystery of her personality seemed to surcharge the room. He did not wonder if he could help her. It was outside the instinct of his personality to interfere in the movement of other persons' lives.

The keener his perception of drama about, the more aloof he remained, but he became watchful and vibrant

with an undemonstrative sympathy. Instinctively he refrained from giving her away. He made no exclamation about her pallor or the troubled look that faced him. He understood at once the meaning of her words. He was to distract their attention from her, and in a quiet way he did that. He talked, and after some moments realised that she had gone from the room unnoticed. A fit of abstraction and tiredness came over him; he suddenly said good-bye and hardly listened to the formal expressions of future hospitality his hostess uttered. He said nothing till Evelyn seemed to add some words; her voice was round and soft, and caught his attention unexpectedly. He looked at her and his grey heavy eyes lit up for a moment; he shook hands and then went out by the open window that reached to the ground, out into the blaze of the stars. His dog, who was lying down a little way off, got up and came towards him. He waited for it to approach, his face lifted to the firmament, which seemed overladen with its clusters of throbbing lights. The sensitive fine profile was visible to them in the dimly-lit room, the close-cut hair that rippled near the parting. Evelyn noticed this and in a shy admiration thought it very wonderful: he had the head of a certain type of ascetic soldier rather than an artist's, thin and bronzed; he was very tall, and his clothes, worn loosely, were in no way conspicuous, suggesting simply the usual things men had in the country.

Then he was gone and the three women moved in their places.

"You did not tell me he was so nice," said Mrs. Malleson, gently.

"You would not listen," said Hester, with a laugh.

Evelyn said nothing.

"You met him at Lady Acres'?"

"He was there all the time we were."

"And he did not know we lived here?"

"No."

"Then you weren't very intimate at Hailing. I mean, well he did not learn anything about you."

"Evelyn was very intimate," said Hester again with a laugh.

"You all said so," Evelyn answered suddenly, "but we weren't really."

"Or really were?"

A faint colour suffused the girl's cheeks.

"Oh! well, what does *really* mean?"

She looked up at the stars as he had, remembered that he had, and a warm audacity quivered through her. "Perhaps we *really* were," she said.

"It rests on a definition then."

"Yes," she answered, coming back from the stars, "but I can't define it."

. . . . . .

Some hours later Malleson came down carrying a small lamp in his hand. The house was silent and the

little noises of night fell upon his ears here and there as he went, with that touch of remonstrance the darkness seems to give out at interruption of the belated bed-seeker. The ribbon of light from the lamp sent wavering impotent flashes into the impenetrable darkness, the end of the passage would come unexpected and the haven of a doorway rise up like some magic architecture in a dream, the door only giving a sense of solidity as the handle is touched and the warm refuge of a bedroom confronts the desiring body and tired spirit.

He closed the door quietly, and after a moment's pause passed in front of the wide four-poster bed in which his wife lay, and looked long at her. She appeared very frail and beautiful in sleep. A fine lawn cap was tied under her chin, its white meeting the white of her nightdress, giving a nun-like appearance to the pale face. Wrinkles faintly chiselled, and blue veins added to the austerity of middle age that makes a countenance in sleep even more wonderful than the clear curves of youth. A low fire was smouldering in the grate, for the nights were chill on the moor, the last embers flickered up, revealing fantastic shadows that crossed the damask coverlet. There was a faint odour of lavender everywhere, a scent his wife always used. His lamp shone on the columns of the four-poster; they were delicately-carved mahogany of an ancient mould. The canopy above was supported by grotesque heads,

PROPERTY OF THE

fauns and dryads. Like all old carvings, seen in a dim light, taking a mocking reality, almost a fleshiness into their wooden countenance and sprightly limbs, the recumbent sleeping woman seemed a still thing, more plastic than those elfish thoughts of a sculptor's brain fashioned in mahogany, the life of the tree breaking out anew in them as it were. Over the mantelpiece hung a sixteenth-century portrait of a grave young man with his hand on his sword. The drugget was of a thick pile, a white ground patterned with garlands of roses. All the furniture was massive and beautiful, and exquisite order reigned. This had been their room for thirty years. A sudden feeling of dire pity swept through him. He tiptoed over the thick carpet to the dressing-room beyond, in which was another bed. He hurriedly shut the door between, as if to shut out the sight of all that he had seen so newly after years of intimacy, the old familiar room that had taken so sinister an aspect, so mocking a reminder, so detailed a presence, all so much hers, part of her, from which she was to be dragged, uprooted, torn, the frail white body thrust out to live in some hideous little room, stifling, with no appurtenances, the dirty hands of a squalid little maid to finger her linen! Were such thoughts bearable! He shivered as he undressed and crawled into the narrow bed, lonely and desolate. There must be some way out, and his near-sighted eyes peered into the darkness to find that way . . .

CHAPTER VII

RENE awoke on the morrow alert and wide-eyed to a consciousness of impending evil, of powers closing round her that would prove overwhelming. Her father had been disturbed by the knowledge of the bank's failure in a way that suggested, in his despair, almost an animal at bay. She saw clearly that the calamity of their lost fortune was to have issues of a more sinister kind than the mere loss of money. She felt that her father would be sacrificed and all her being revolted against this. She must shelter him. She must see to it that the weight did not fall upon him. She must come between him and her mother and sisters, yet she was to spare them too! She became confused before so impossible a battle. Happily at breakfast they hardly noticed her. Hester threw out some question as to what she had thought of Mark Grey, and Mrs. Malleson answered for her with a witty rejoinder; she had stroked the girl's hair as she passed to her place and had then become absorbed in her letters. Evelyn was silent. Now and then she lifted her drooping eyelids and glanced at Rene, a faint smile curving her lips; she was thinking of the painter.

Rene did not raise her eyes when her father came into the room, a little late as was his habit, she dared

not, and yet when at last she threw a look across the table she found he was serenely plodding through some pamphlet from a Zoological Society. For a moment he looked at her reassuringly, she all but heard him murmur, "*It's nothing, my Rene, we'll get through,*" his eyebrows ironically raised, a signal she knew so well. She wanted to shout, "Oh! it's all right, it's all right, as if *we* aren't going to manage!".

Something of confidence stole through her when a shadow fell across the window which opened out to the front garden.

"Oh! it's Mr. Crawley," said Mrs. Malleson. "Basil, it's Mr. Crawley!"

"I am sorry to disturb you," came the harsh voice. "I got your note, Mr. Malleson, but I am afraid I cannot manage this morning . . . will to-morrow do?"

The scholar turned pale, he looked hurriedly at his wife.

"Certainly, Crawley—to-morrow then—there is nothing but what can wait," he said, with emphasis.

"If there is anything I can do—"

"No, no," interrupted Malleson.

The great bulky form of the agent moved away, the sunlight again broke across the table, and the old scholar mumbled in Greek:

"You can stand out of the sunshine."

Rene's lips curved with humour.

"We really would have to have more than one tub," she said meditatively.

"Oh! quite a row of them," said he, and the two of them laughed in a gurgling way over their tea.

"What are you laughing at?" said his wife.

"You in a tub, my dear."

"Really, Basil!"

"No, mother, it's because we can't imagine you in a tub."

And then, suddenly, they both became grave, looked with parted lips and fear in their eyes at the fragrant little lady in her lace and flowered silk.

"You two! Does anyone ever know what you mean?"

"Rene is incorrigible," said Malleson, wistfully.

He got up and shuffled out of the room. Rene remained, fearful lest her mother should suspect anything; but the good lady only said, in a dreamy way, when they were alone, "He will fall in love with you, Rene, and then what of Evelyn?"

The girl knew at once that the painter was alluded to.

"Do you think he is the kind of man who will marry at all?" she answered directly.

"Why not?"

"Because I don't think he is. . . . Oh! don't let Evelyn—don't let Evelyn think . . ."

"She has known him some time."

"Yes, but his coming is quite an accident. And then money, you know—he is the kind who must have money."

"Well!"

"Oh! well." Again she was brought up breathless before the situation.

"He isn't good enough for her," she said simply as a way out.

"I thought he was charming!"

"Ah! but that's it, he is charming to everyone."

"How do you know?"

"Was he not charming to all of us? Was he not charming to you? He is used to it—the girls have told me about him. Everyone cares for him and he is tired of it—he doesn't need it. No one can give him anything that in the long run would be significant."

"Are you in love with him, Rene?"

"I, oh! I love people, you know. I can't help it. He is very wonderful—I would like it to happen with Evelyn, but it won't, it won't, and I don't want her to be unhappy, or you . . ."

A faint colour spread over Mrs. Malleson's face.

"You are talking wildly as you always do. . . . I was, of course, not serious—"

"Not serious?"

"One does not speak seriously of such things so soon."

"But we must, to save her."

"You are absurd . . . unless—"

"Unless?"

"Has he made love to you already, Rene?"

"To me!"

An odd look came into the girl's eyes. "No, no," she said hurriedly.

Evelyn at this moment returned to the room; she glanced from her sister to her mother.

"Did either of you notice that father wasn't looking himself at breakfast?"

Rene did not answer.

"No," said Mrs. Malleson, "I didn't notice—did you, Rene?"

"I don't think it was anything, Evelyn; you know he was working late last night. He so often overtires himself. I am sure he does too much, but it is so difficult to prevent him. No, he isn't really ill. Ah! but we have to take care of him, haven't we?"

"What is the matter with you, Rene, to-day? You are so excited. . . ." Mrs. Malleson spoke softly, without very much concern.

"I am, I think I am." She pushed her hand through her heavy hair. "I will go out . . . we have been poring over Semiramis for days," she laughed. She moved nervously from the window into the sunlight.

Why was she so afraid? Again the feeling of some pending calamity was at hand, of which she knew nothing, but of which all this was the shadow as it were—

the warning, and that she must do something—but what? . . . Other people lost money, other people had been ruined, why was she so afraid? But no answer came to her, only a greater sense of apprehension.

The day was very fine, with a light breeze that seemed concerned with one, playing upon one's face and buffeting small things in little gusts, so much as if it were talking to all it touched in a caressing way; fragile objects bent willingly to it, and the countless blades of grass turned silver as it swept their edges, whilst great white clouds rolled up to pattern the blue above them. She hastened through the high wall lest she might be stopped, hardly daring to look behind her. Once outside, however, the scent of the sunlit turf, the fragrance of all the wild things that grew between the blades of the quivering grass, stretching for miles to the horizon, her senses were pricked to a new life; she turned her head to meet the breeze, her nostrils faintly dilating. Then she sped away, her skirts rippling about her ankles to the wind. She made a white silhouette on the moors, dipped in and out of its curves like a fleeting ship seen on uneven waters, or a white-winged bird. She dropped, as she went, the sense of care, and gradually became absorbed in the great breath of Nature. Soaked in the air, soaked in the sunshine, she sped on for miles without a halt, her pace quickening to a run, an easy movement, her body curving to breast the wind that in

the heights was keener, her head lifted to taste its breath on her lips.

And only after perhaps an hour's going did she at last throw herself down to rest on the slope of a ridge. The heat of the earth seemed to beat through her body. She lay with her hands under her head looking up at the serene arch of the heavens. She was hot and the moisture of her body was pleasant to feel, her ropes of heavy, yellow hair, loose over her shoulders, glistened with damp. She panted happily and drowsed. She ceased to be troubled by the consideration of the future or the bank failure. Who could say that money was to count so much! There was after all the earth and —and her father! . . . The others slipped from her imagination, and she and he were together here on the warm ground having it out over Semiramis! Was it not the shadow of Crawley that had made things seem so much worse! Ah! he was an abomination! But who cared when one could listen to the hurrying of beetles and rustling of the breeze, and actually the noise of the throbbing haze of heat. She lay very still; now and then her thoughts for a brief moment dwelt on the personality of Mark Grey. Something in the kindness of his grey eyes suggested the pathos of a too-restrained nature, the withholding always of his personality from touch with his fellows which gave him that strong power of wise sympathy, unexpected and expressed in monosyllables. Would he marry Evelyn?

And she left the thought, for, in the great peace about her, questions lost in a sense their meaning—most remained unanswered, fulfilment seemed everywhere about her in the wonderful process of time's intentions.

When the warm young body had cooled, and the moisture was dry on her cheeks, she stirred lazily, shook her lithe person and got up on her feet. The hill sloped gradually to a hollow in which squatted, as it were, a low-roofed cottage near a stagnant pool of water, which for the time was reflecting the colour of the heavens and lay a blue streak in the lap of the grass. The cottage was black with age and neglect, and for some reason was shut up, no sign of life stirred anywhere near. She asked herself what had happened, and peered through the light to get a better view. Yes, there was someone—a stranger—two of them! Meek and hateful, with an appearance of watching the silent cottage. She scanned it again and observed that the smoke was curling out of the chimney. They were there then! But only those two stationary creatures outside.

She began to descend the steep decline, her firm feet gripping easily the loose earth here and there. She went at a swing, her chin lifted and a still look of anger in her eyes. Something of the truth flashed upon her.

These unhappy occupants of the cottage were perhaps the poorest folk in the neighbourhood. An ill woman with a family of tired children, anæmic from

birth—a grown-up son with an immense frame and muscles, yet without vitality. He did not work. Everyone knew that he would not work, and Rene understood that he could not. The brain and body had never been sufficiently nourished to supply the red corpuscles which give energy to the human body, and for the lack of which the human frame is a useless machine, even when there may be no specific disease. Had the man been a gentleman he would have been loved and cared for by his friends and relations, excuses found for his inability to follow a profession, and money found that he might travel. Among the poor such a man is regarded as a scoundrel and vagabond, and possibly becomes one, since that is the rôle assigned him. He does not know why he can't work, he knows only that he doesn't and that the whole world, consequently, is against him. The stoic way in which such a man bears the shame cast at him is one of the pitiable things of human nature. Sometimes he does not bear it, and then he commits murder, or larceny, or some other crime, in a sudden mad revenge against his lot, a spasmodic energy of the lethargic body against his horrible birthright of inaction.

Rene had encountered this man one day in a broad sunlit sheep-track that went rising and falling for a mile across the moor, and they had walked silently along together, after the peculiar recognition wayfarers give one another when passing on the road, and then, when

she had come to the black cottage and observed ill-clad children squatting in a circle playing some queer game with knuckle bones, she had sat down among them, without a smile. Peasants have a horror of smiling gentry, its hateful patronage mocks them, and they find it oddly enough imbecile, this uncalled-for smile that always greets them from the well washed and dressed—it scatters them to their lairs, this overture at amity! It is always to them a grin. The peasant smiles rarely. He smiles at the maid he loves, or at a little child he is teaching some man's trick, or at a pup that frolics. He smiles because his humour is tickled, or his heart touched, just as he speaks when he has something to say, and remains silent when he has nothing. Thus Rene had sat down among these half-gipsy children a little way off, and after a while had thrown knuckle bones with them. Time after time she had come to them casually, without any motive, slipped among them and taken part in any odd work they were about, as if it were part of a visitor's business just to do what came to hand. It had seemed to Rene that they were poor beyond bearing, yet in spite of rags and often a day with hardly a meal, their home was to them a home; all their life had been spent in the tumble-down cottage; the few potatoes they were able to grow on the land reclaimed from the moor and not even hedged in kept them from starvation, and now she realised that they were in trouble, and that Society, not satisfied with

the long years of their struggle, was menacing their very existence by demands the poor wretches had no means of complying with. They had paid no rent for years. Was the hovel worth it! What was the monster, Crawley, after, harassing such unfortunate people? Oh! She knew the story—they were idle vagabonds, drunkards and all the horrible rest that was made out against such folk. Yet when a gentleman's son was in his cups the fact at most would evoke a smile from his world.

She hurried past the men and knocked at the barred door.

"We canna let ye in." The voice was tired and Rene knew that probably the poor wretches had had nothing to eat since Heaven knows how long. They had barricaded themselves in.

She called through the crevice quietly, "Unbar the window at the back. I will wait here and then slip quickly round."

"You had better go away."

"No, no, I must see you."

She waited, listening. The men outside did not move, certain that the inmates of the cottage would not open the door. They had been there many hours and were bored and sulky.

Rene listened. She heard a faint noise that suggested the moving of a shutter bar. She turned her eyes on the men—eyes ablaze. They shifted theirs

uneasily, looked deliberately away with the absurd intimation in their movement that blazing eyes made no difference to their boredom of sitting on a mud bank all day; the moment their eyes were off her she slipped round the cottage. When the men furtively brought their gaze back from their absorption of the landscape the white girl was gone. They leapt to their feet and hastened to the door. It was close-barred; they strolled stupidly round the cottage in time to see a slight tremor of the window shutter. Then they became aware that Crawley was on the upper ridge of the down. In a moment he came stumbling over the loose ground, bloated with anger.

This effort at eviction was a purely unlawful one; the agent took little trouble to waste either his time or money upon legal right when dealing with the poor. He had determined to get rid of these beggarly tenants who had paid no rent for years, and to do so without any waste of money over the business. They had no right whatever to remain, and such people had no power to appeal. They were poachers, idlers and generally those unhappy beings against whom the law uses a fine flow of misnomers to safeguard them from its own protection. Crawley knew perfectly well that he could turn this family out into the road with impunity. Who would be likely to take the part of such riff-raff? Had he not been over-kind all these years? The cottage had hitherto seemed to him worthless; he had no intention

of repairing the very tumble-down place, but some new scheme was in his mind, and he did not for a moment hesitate in his determination to get rid of them. That they had not paid rent for two or three years was a fact; that it had been paid for generations by the parents and grandparents of these folk was an outside matter. That the value of the property had been over and over again paid for did not concern him; he was in his rights and he was being thwarted by scum. He looked evilly at his men, perceived their slightly inebriate condition and shouted his questions with awful oaths. Their complacent satisfaction, however, was undisturbed—they had been guarding the place for many hours with a can of spirituous liquor between them. They had little inclination to violence, since violence against such a door, they explained, would be a waste of good muscle.

Suddenly one said laconically:

"Malleson's filly is inside."

Crawley's expression changed.

"How did Miss Malleson get in?" The tone was awful.

The men shuffled.

"Broke in."

"Oh! *she* could manage it, it would seem."

"Not broke in exactly," said the other. "Got in."

"Precisely, got in. I sent you here to do that."

"The young lady was favoured."

"Favoured be damned, you drunken fool!"

"Well, try yursel'," said the man, not the least disconcerted; "we 'av been at it considerable like . . ."

Crawley walked up to the door, then paused.

Meanwhile Rene within found matters even worse than she had expected. The unfortunate woman was dying, and whilst she was dying she was concerned with this business of keeping out Crawley's men. Her faded eyes glittered with satisfaction as she heard Crawley's riding-whip beat on the door.

"He's come hisself," she said grimly, "the bloody pig."

The room was almost dark, a shutter was over the window, the light fell in streaks through interstices and a small hole in the roof. At first Rene could hardly see, coming out of the sunshine; gradually, however, the white faces of the children huddled together in a corner loomed out from halos of darkness behind them. They were not crying, they shared something of their mother's excitement over keeping at bay these enemies, only there was a look that was difficult to analyse; and then suddenly the meaning became clear. They were starving. They were starving and dying in this darkness, and outside was the sunshine, and the flowing moor, and food in abundance in every farmstead. The monotonous rapping of Crawley's whip on the door was awful.

She turned to the woman's son; his great propor-

tions loomed out of the shadows in a fantastic way—he had the build of a David. For a moment she looked at him with a little indignation.

"Couldn't you get her food?" she asked.

He spoke in a hollow voice.

"How?"

"Somehow."

"I had to be here—and her going, they would have got in."

"Better that than to die like this."

"I don' know."

Then she saw that he was sick too, his hands shook and his hollow eyes looked as if a whole world's tiredness were in them.

"Oh! Sam!"

"You see thems after me for poaching—couldn't be put away afore she be gone . . . and then the childers—thems funny—an' thems frightened 'cause she be dying."

"I'll go and get some food—let me out—I'll keep them off."

"You!"

"My God! yes," she answered, "let me out."

With trembling hands the big man again removed the shutter.

"I won't be long," she said, and sprang out. No one was on that side of the house. They were not expecting her to leave. She hastened up the precip-

itous side of the great slope, trying to think as she went of the nearest farm. At any rate she would have a mile to run—after all that was not far! She sped along easily. She realised that there was little hope for the woman. She would send a farm boy for Dr. Martin—if only he were back. Oh! what a world! What a world! Poor woman! To the last with battle in her eyes against her oppressors—the shadowy room with those stern, suffering human beings, fighting to the very death against all odds—was it forgetable?

How ominous had sounded that continuous rapping at the door by Crawley with the butt end of his whip—the very thought of his personality behind the boards had been awful; it was he that was tormenting these unhappy people—always this sinister and dire man was present when there was pain.

She reached an outlying farm at last; she had run two miles in a short enough time. She panted as she attained the gate and halted for a moment; fortunately the farmer was standing on his threshold and came out to her. She explained breathlessly what she wanted—some milk and food; "the whole family are starving," she said, "and would he send one of his boys for Dr. Martin." The man called to a rather slovenly girl, who clattered across the cobbles, to do his bidding, then Rene rested, leaning against the porch.

"Come in and sit down," he said.

"No," she answered, "I want to get back. You know they want to turn her out and I must prevent them."

"Who's doin' it?" said the farmer.

"Why, Crawley," she said.

"I thought so—an illegal eviction, I'll take me oath."

"What do you mean?" she asked anxiously; "surely, surely, he would not dare . . ."

"Oh! Crawley will do anything—that saves his pocket. He won't spend mor' 'an he must. A magistrate's order means money down, eh?—if Crawley can do it without he'll do it, but it isn't legal and bain't got any kind o' rights."

"How iniquitous!"

"Oh, come, I believe they are no sort o' class—rascally beggars, but they'se been there and their fathers afore 'em for longer than any we can remember. They weren't always down—decent folk once; but a good long time ago, Miss Malleson."

She held out her hand for the can of milk and the parcel of food. "God in heaven! he ought to be killed," she said.

"You mustn't fash yoursel', Miss Malleson, it's the world! and no doubt he could have gotten a magistrate's order had he the mind."

"Then let him get it first," she threw over her shoulder and hurried away.

He pondered over her concern, wondered, smiled a little awry. "Damned if she won't corner the old blighter!"

When the girl did at last reach the cottage with the food and milk she went immediately to the door. Crawley was standing near.

She turned her eyes with difficulty to his. This act of harassing a dying woman froze the blood in her veins. She had to control herself from some power she felt within her to destroy this man. If she let herself go she would destroy him. As there were moments when she felt the wondrous movements of creation within her, so at times the whirlwind of destruction seemed in her hands, not an evil power, but inevitable, a passion and force which seemed to stir with the elements—sweeping from space, as it were, things that must not be, that were in themselves breeders of destruction, therefore must be destroyed. After all it is not a lonely God who has the burning to do, but a necessity latent in all human beings to annihilate the thing that destroys. This girl was unconscious of the philosophy of the emotions; she only felt the passion of their insistence and the power they had, which was perhaps greater in her than in others, of annulling all impartial reason or action; blind to all issues but the balance of justice she became as if possessed. Wonderfully, amazingly she controlled it—was frightened of it—pathetically did not understand it.

Crawley met the blaze of her strange eyes and shifted his own.

"We are obliged to turn these people out, Miss Malleson."

"The woman is dying."

"They do that. I have known it before, take to their beds to put the thing off. . . . They think they will be left—some people leave them, I don't."

"You don't?"

"No! it's a trick."

"For what?"

"To gain time."

"To die?"

"To live!" he sneered.

"Precisely, to live. . . . Have you thought of that —like you and I, they must live?"

"They are idle vagabonds, a nuisance to the place, law-breakers."

"Are you not breaking the law now?"

He staggered for a moment.

She put her lips to the crack of the door. "Open, Sam, it is all right. He can do nothing. He has no right to turn you out. These men can't do it—they are not police!" Slowly and carefully each word was uttered that they might hear within.

"I have brought some food."

Crawley seized her arm.

"Miss Malleson, you are interfering where you have

no right. Do you think that three men against one and some children will not get the upper hand?—I'm master here."

"You have no magistrate's order."

"No, but I shall have them out."

"It's unlawful."

"Pshaw!"

A sudden fear came over her. This horrible man would do what he said. Law was nothing to him! Who would bother about it? Who would concern themselves with these unhappy beggars, poachers, thieves perhaps, sent packing lawfully or unlawfully—a good riddance! But what then! what of them? She swayed on her feet.

"Don't open yet, Sam," she called.

"If," went on Crawley, "they do not open now, at once, then we will smoke them out."

"You would not do that to a dying woman?"

"She's not dying!"

Rene put down the can she was holding and food on the step.

The agent watched her young beauty. He had never been so near her before, her slender, beautiful body, the panting bosoms, the white, luminous flesh of her throat and cheeks, the ropes of fair, glistening hair in their matted plaits. Rage had been burning within him at being thwarted, now a sudden engulfing male desire surged through his blood to assail brutally this

white, interfering girl. How dare she risk herself in battle with him! He put out his hairy, horrible hand and clutched her arm. She swayed at his touch. He thought she was afraid, was going to faint, and a delicious sense that with this rage he dared be tender to her made him pale; she was in his arms and did not resist. He felt her heart beating, her warm bosoms against him. Such passion was hell—he would crush her to death. Her eyes lifted.

"Mr. Crawley, I ask you not to do this thing. The poor woman is dying." She met the lust in his eyes.

He laughed.

"The exchange is to hold you in my arms," his face was close to hers.

Then she did the extraordinary undoing thing. She put her hand on his face tenderly. "You will go away because I ask you." The flames of her eyes burnt into his body—they were caressing.

He dropped her with a cry, hoarse and awful, and strode away calling off the men. They stumbled up the steep, mystified by the sudden withdrawal, and disappeared over the ridge.

CHAPTER VIII

RENE battered at the door.

"Open it, Sam, it is all right, he is gone. He won't come back. It is quite safe!"

It seemed an interminable time before he came. Then slowly the door moved and she slipped in, still herself in a sense afraid that the horror that had been without might gain an entry. "Oh! close it," she said, pale with emotion, staggering under the burden of the awful thing she had done, for she had—she had actually for one single moment yielded herself to the passion of this monster, this satyr whose horrible face had scorched her person—she had yielded for the woman's sake, and the horror of it with the reaction, shook her frame as a sapling before the gusts of a storm.

"What is it? What is the matter with you?" he asked, assailed by the contagion of her fear. "You said they had gone." He was starving, and he too trembled with her.

"All right, Sam! See, here is some milk—give her some now—it is warm from the milking"—she moved to the side of the woman whose strange black eyes were upon her. They held the cup to her lips, which trembled as had their bodies, not from fear but desire for nourishment. Some of it spilt on the soiled blanket,

and the children, who were watching, looked regretfully at the wasted drops.

The woman took, after all, but a little—

"That was good," she murmured feebly, and watched the cup in their hands; she looked towards the children. Rene went to them and let them drink their fill—one child began to cry the moment the cup was in her fingers—she could not drink from sheer desire. Rene knelt down and held the cup for the little child as she had for the dying woman, and the mite at last took great gulps. Sam watched enviously and then took up the jug and drank from it a very little. When he had finished he laughed sillily; the tears started to the girl's eyes.

She returned to the dying woman. Sam began to cut pieces of bread, the children pressing round him: they had forgotten the woman. She, however, watched them under drooping eyelids with a look of subdued triumph. They had got the best of the "bloody pig" as she had found it comforting to name him.

"He has gone," she murmured, "the skunk."

"Yes," said Rene. "It is all right. He won't come back; you are safe and the doctor will come soon."

"Doctor!" There was scorn in her voice. "Them be mostly fools!" She paused. An odd silence fell over the place; they were all eating.

"Sam'll go on the road," she said suddenly—"kept 'im from it so far—no use now!"

"Oh! Sam will get something to do."

"No, 'e can't work no more than a babe—"

"He'll get strong."

"No," she said. A strange look suddenly crept into her eyes. She clawed the blanket with a frail movement.

"They be eating"—she could not finish, but her eyes said "don't say anything"; a faint smile touched hardly her lips but the creases about her eyes, as if it was a little affair between herself and Rene this not bothering them over her death, and Rene saw the death rise over her face that was to leave it still forever.

The girl did not move. Had not the woman signed to her to let the starving children have their fill first: the shadows deepened in the room and the soft sound of munching and breaths caught between mouthfuls made a rhythmic sound in the silence. At last Sam shuffled clumsily to the bed, meaning not to make a noise, thinking his mother slept.

Rene leant slightly against him with a sense of giving some comfort.

"She has gone, Sam."

He looked stupidly down at his mother. "I couldn't get the doctor all along o' that skunk."

"It would not have been any use, Sam."

"I would ha' gone but she wouldn't hear o' it. She wouldn't have me leave her."

"Here's Dr. Martin!"

A big man came quietly into the cottage. He had the face of a priest, full and heavy, with rounded contour, fleshy, yet in no wise bloated, rather the pallor of the student was his. His prominent eyes were heavy lidded, and searching between periods of an absent look that kept his patients wondering if he had forgotten their existence.

"Get out of this, Miss Rene. It's contagious."

"And the children!"

"I'll do what I can."

"Nonsense—I must help."

"What do you want to do?"

"Everything. I can't leave the children."

"I'll get someone in."

"We must do that anyhow, meanwhile here I am."

"I'll stay if you'll only go."

"I can't yet."

. . . . . .

It was dark when she came out of the cottage, a faint light glimmering at interstices in the sky, where heavy clouds were rolling in masses as if bringing darkness with them as it were to enhance the night.

The young man stood by her side.

"What will you do, Sam?"

He lifted his head and watched the moving heavens, and then after a pause, said:

"The road!" The thought had brought a flicker of

momentary happiness—the long-wished-for thing was to happen.

"The children!"

His lids dropped—his dark eyes searched hers for blame: he was ready to be angry, angry to white heat. Had not one suffered enough?—but he found none.

"Them must go to the House."

"I suppose that would be the best."

"The worst is the best for 'un."

Some time later as she climbed the steep, scented the quicker winds of the heights and hastened along towards home, her heart beat with excitement for all she had witnessed through the day. She wondered at the happiness she had experienced in the morning sunlight, and then thought of the entry into that darkened, squalid room, where human beings were actually starving in fear of one man, who could keep them there prisoners, like animals at bay, too stupid to move—one awful man! And the thing had been done unlawfully. On this wide fragrant moor, so open, so free, its rich farms laden with the produce of the earth, one tumbled little ruin, a grey excrescence, an infinitesimal spot in all the palpitating gold under the beneficent heavens, had held these tortured human beings trapped and harried by their own species. It was all unthinkable, and like a dream, and through it, holding it as it were, was the consciousness of the man more horrible than any beast —the gloating face close to hers that she had dared to

touch—a civilised human more loathsome than any wild creature. She trembled as she went, and looked back to assure herself that she was not followed. If only she were home! It was still a long way, and a sense of fatigue was beginning to numb her limbs. Gradually thoughts of it all became vague through her desire to be within shelter. She began to run, only fleeting visions pressed now and then before her of this incident or that. The faces of the two men watching the house—the starving children. Sam, in his impotence, looked sullenly at her. Picture after picture recurred as she went, raised a sigh or shudder. Ah! it would be good to be home. Then at last she reached the door in the wall, pushed through and hastened into the house. "Oh, James," she murmured as she met the old servant watching at the door, "isn't it late! I am so tired; where is mother?"

He motioned towards the dining-room, and she knew by his look that they were angry, and the heart of her quailed. It would be so dreadfully hard to bear their anger, because they were bitter when they were angry, and she could never quite speak the conciliatory words. Hester paced the room.

"It is really shameful, Rene, your running about the country like a peasant girl when it is dark!"

"They were in such trouble."

"Is it for you," put in her mother, "to be with such people? I hear that they are quite low scoundrels."

"That is the way people talk, isn't it, mother?"

"Nonsense, Rene, you know perfectly well they are disreputable poachers and thieves."

"Well, poachers and thieves, which I do not admit, they are human beings."

"You should not speak like that to mother. You have upset her; what impression will Mr. Grey have of us? . . ."

So the murder was out. It was a question of Mr. Grey. Rene laughed and then looked serious.

"I am very sorry," she said doggedly; "I couldn't help it."

"You never can," they went on. She ceased to listen.

"How's father?" she interrupted, and the remembrance of his suffering came back to her.

The question seemed to irritate her assailants rather than otherwise. There was a cold rejoinder that he was perfectly well. Her anxiety for him seemed an excuse on her part to get away from the subject, and they fell to it anew with the extraordinary persistence of people building up a grievance against the person who has given offence.

"You are always doing it. We didn't know what had happened to you, and we never know."

"I'm very tired," said Rene, suddenly.

"Of course you are tired"—they moved dishes of food towards her place with trembling hands. She remembered the trembling hands of the starving children,

the physical similarity was extraordinary, she touched with her mind on cause and effect, then she laughed a short odd laugh that was uncanny to hear, and that momentarily made them all look at her. They found it was indecent to laugh when they were so angry. They were extraordinarily angry.

"I don't know why you are so angry," she said.

Angry! that, as always, was the supreme insult. They were of course not angry, and they enforced this attitude upon her with a fury that was more than disconcerting. Hester was white to the lips and Evelyn sat morose, ejaculating odd little sentences of disapproval. The unhappy girl ate her supper during a continuous assault, and suddenly Evelyn said, "What will people say?"

"Does that matter?" said Rene, ironically.

"It does matter. What do you think!"

She was hungry and she ate with persistence, but the food tasted like pieces of wood in her mouth, and then suddenly she could not go on; she got up from her place.

"The woman was dying," she said abruptly, "and even had I remembered that you would have been anxious I could not have come sooner."

"How dare you say such a thing?" said Hester.

"You," returned the girl with sudden contempt, "you make me tired."

She turned to her mother and stood looking at her

oddly. For a moment there was silence. Then Rene said, "She died of starvation while I was there! It could not happen to us like that—nothing quite so horrible could happen to us—at least I think not." She put her hand through her damp hair—"It's rather absurd this quarrelling!"

"There is more sense in it than your romantics," thrust in Hester.

Mrs. Malleson said, "Hush! The unfortunate woman is dead then"; her face had gone a little pale and a peculiar look crept into her ordinarily cold eyes. She felt shocked, but found it difficult to change her attitude of censure, but was glad when Rene turned and went from the room. She looked at her two daughters who were always what she expected and desired; even in their few words of admonition they had, of course, been quite right. Perhaps they had combinedly said too much. The death of the woman changed the aspect of things, and the look of reproach in the girl's eyes when she had spoken of poverty had reached some centre of her own being that had become shaken to a response, the child's force of imagination enveloped one, as she had said they could never be poor in that way . . . but what bee had Rene in her bonnet to suppose that they could want at all! In throwing off the idea she became more conscious of its presence. She found herself haunted by some absurd shock of apprehension and had to seek distraction by changing her thoughts—

the thing recurred, however; as she said good-night to the girls, she murmured:

"Rene is romantic!" and neither of the girls knew exactly to what she was alluding, but they took it simply as the final verdict against roaming at night and consorting with odious people.

Evelyn had at once forgiven her sister on hearing of the woman's plight. With her thoughts full of tenderness for the new visitor, she found it easy to feel kindly, though she had suffered at what she felt was indecorous in her sister's behaviour, and so dishonouring the wonderful thing that she did not know was in her heart, love—and love with such women is both humble and proud. Nothing must happen that should reflect upon the honour of their home, as it were, before the strange new guest whom she was too innocent to realise had walked straight into her heart. Yes, she had scolded, with the others, this wayward young sister of hers, more than she had meant, and she wondered in her new consciousness of beauty—for love is that—whether she had not done so too much.

Rene, meanwhile laden with the tragic emotions her gentler relations would never experience, and superficially irritated by the petty wrangling she had had to submit to, went quickly up the stairs to her father's room, and on nearing the top, the old sweet peace of proximity to him fell over her being. He would be there, and life would be sweet again in the great study

1310568

near the skies. Their anxiety of the day before seemed a lesser thing now. Something they could fight together, and as she neared the top her step grew lighter as she took the stairs in twos. She slipped silently through the door and looked across at her father, who was seated at the immense table, the reading-lamp shedding its light across his face and hands, and leaving the rest all in dim warm shadows, rich with the colour of bindings and metal instruments and mahogany shelves. He raised his eyes at once and began to speak as if she had been in the room all the while.

"Such an anecdote I have unearthed here in the queerest Greek of our Semiramis," he said.

"Semiramis!" exclaimed Rene, and leapt into her old world from the shadow and sorrow of the present with that ease and delight only scholars can experience. "Semiramis!"

CHAPTER IX

Mark Grey moved lazily along the thin ridge of the downs which cut the horizon immediately above Donnington. His tall figure was silhouetted against the immense clouds. He peered into the distances, watching the subtle movement of light that hovered over the plains. The black retriever hurried to and fro about him, nosing the ground with the untiring enthusiasm of its kind. It was early, and the earth had her morning tentative aspect, the whiteness which had not yet been warmed by the sun; the wet of dew still lingered on the edges of things and shadows were iridescent and gradually stealing away. Distant horizons had become edged with purple, and hollows still held the mystery of mists encircling them. The chimneys of Donnington sent a pale spiral of smoke upwards. The arched door in the wall was open, and showed the bright colouredness of the garden, like a panel of potential gaiety, waiting too, in the scintillating hush, for the coming day. No human being was visible.

The first interruption seemed to break through the filmy gauzes of the silent atmosphere and call a sudden warmth into all things. A labourer passed, then some cattle in the distance began to move, and everything pricked into a common wakefulness. After the naked

night and the veiled dawn came the clothed morning—the work-a-day coat—dreams hidden till sunset, and the wonder and mystery and passion of work to speed its practical way for the new sunset, for the new night and the new dawn.

Mark became conscious that a white figure was absorbing his attention, and that it was the figure of the youngest Miss Malleson, the extraordinarily beautiful girl who had romped in the hay, like a wild creature, to come in amongst them later with a pale, haunted face and so simply make him aware of her distress and the necessity of secrecy. Had that been anything after all? Had it not been just a mood with her, a reaction from gaiety? and this absorbing him into her confidence just a woman's wonderful way of taking possession?

She was coming to him now with the same direct simplicity and he felt unreasonably glad—but what was she to him? he asked himself with sudden fury. He had come out to work. His fingers tightened over the buckle of his knapsack with the jealous self-intimation that this was the thing that mattered, and his mood just to work.

In a moment she was by his side. He took off his cap and held it in his hand. To-day she seemed neither sad nor gay.

"Are you going to paint?" she said.

He looked absently about. "Oh! not now."

"Why not now?"

"I have met you;" he spoke as if he were a little distressed.

"I need not prevent you."

"No one prevents me from working."

"Well then?"

Suddenly he smiled at her like a pleased boy.

"We can play. I am ready."

She laughed. "Is that all I am good for?"

"Women!" he said vaguely.

They were both silent for some moments.

"I am not women!" she said, and he answered,

"That is why one loves you, you seem everything they are not . . . and yet after all you are!" he added despondently.

"You don't seem to like them."

"I don't think I do."

"You care for nothing but this?" she asked, placing her hand upon his painting materials.

"Well, it is a good deal to care for, isn't it?"

"Art?"

"I don't name it that."

"Why?"

"Names are such absurd little officialisms, they swallow up their own meaning—there is nothing left."

"Didn't you do that when you said 'women'?"

"Perhaps!"

"Are you very fond of money?" she questioned suddenly—out of the blue as it were.

"Why not?" he answered. He perceived as she looked at him now that there were traces still of trouble in her eyes, and he was disconcerted. Why be unhappy in the early morning?

"I had a feeling that you did." She spoke despondently.

"Indeed I do," he said with finality.

"Are you mean?"

A cold, self-analytical expression came on his face.

"I think so." He spoke as if he were speaking of someone else, whilst his eyes looked into hers as if seeking confirmation of what he had said.

"You hate poverty?" she persisted.

"Like nothing else in the world."

"You are frank?"

"Oh! I can lie too," he answered like any schoolboy boasting that he could ride or shoot.

She took the assertion with a raising of her brows.

"You mean you do not mind?"

He caught the train of her thought.

"Nothing," he said.

"I mind . . . don't you sometimes feel the weight of things? Don't you sometimes want to get away?"

"I am always away."

"With me it's only sometimes . . . but it makes the others unhappy."

"Well, people have got to be made unhappy."

"No!"

"How you shout it," he laughed, looking at her, but her eyes were on the distant horizon and he thought, what is she thinking of? . . . and then he thought how beautiful she is, and how white.

"If you care for Evelyn you will go away," she asserted suddenly.

He went on looking at her whiteness.

"I had forgotten her."

"You shouldn't even say such an absurd thing as that."

"I had forgotten her."

"Do you care for her?"

"Yes."

"Then," she said, "you must go."

"No," he answered doggedly. "I have come here for ever."

"That would be so nice!"

"Oh!" he murmured and looked at her queerly.

"Mr. Grey?"

"Yes."

"You have got to give us up."

"I won't."

"You don't ask me why."

"No reason can make any difference. I am never influenced by reasons."

"We have lost all our money. Evelyn will have no dowry."

"Why do you talk about such things? I never think of money."

"But you care for it," she said eagerly.

"I care for all beautiful things!"

"But money isn't a thing—it's a use."

"So are all other things to me."

"You use all things?"

"Yes."

"People?"

"Yes."

"You will make Evelyn unhappy."

"I think so!"

"Not by going away?"

"No, I am not going away."

"You like her enough without?"

"Without what?"

"Money—any money."

"Good God!"

"Then why make her unhappy?"

"It's part of life. You make me unhappy."

She laughed nervously. Their eyes were upon one another, warm and yielding; they looked away suddenly.

"Evelyn is so good you wouldn't intentionally make her unhappy?"

His lids drooped, the heavy, tired expression came over his face.

"I know, I know, perhaps it needn't be . . . who knows?"

"Aren't you going to do some work?"

"How can I work?"

"Then I must go."

"Yes."

She turned on her heel and he said, "Don't go yet."

"Oh!" she answered, not noticing, "I wanted to say that they don't know."

"What?"

"They don't know about the loss of the money. It is best that they shouldn't yet."

"But I don't know."

"Oh! dear liar, don't make me love you too."

Hell witch! But she was gone. He slowly lowered the heavy knapsack from his shoulder.

CHAPTER X

Some hours later Malleson waited with Rene for the coming of Crawley. They sat as they had done on the previous afternoon talking, only with the difference that on their faces was an expression of anxiety. They had not been together long, before the sound of his footsteps reached them. They did not move, looking at one another, expectant, absorbed—the girl as if she would spring at the opening of the door, he, alive with a resisting, more human expression, touched by horror.

Suddenly the girl got up.

"Is there any way of not feeling as we do towards him?" she said. "Are we, after all, being cruel in our condemnation?"

Malleson was silent for a moment; he moved uneasily.

"We know," he said, "so much evil of him . . . but that counts nothing—such can always be explained, mitigated; but how explain an instinct of repugnance! I believe in instinct against all science.—Science—knowledge, call it what you like—has destroyed instinct, and the world has consequently lost. There is no awful thing reason cannot support, explain, prove right or wrong, but nothing can prevail against instinct."

Again they were silent.

The approaching steps sounded ominously. The separate staircase leading to this room was uncarpeted, hard oak steps leading at once from the ground floor without giving access elsewhere, excepting through the panelled door half-way up, so that the sound re-echoed from the winding walls.

"Father, are you afraid?"

The scholar put his hand to his side.

"I am tired," he said.

A knock came at the door sooner than they expected; they looked hurriedly at one another. Malleson got up, "Oh! come in," he murmured, "come in."

The big, heavy man with his arresting face crossed the threshold. His features were abnormally regular; he was, nevertheless, ugly.

His glance remained upon Rene as he shook hands with her father. She backed to the door hurriedly, throwing a *good-morning* with a hasty politeness. Her eyes glittered, and she was gone.

"I got your paper," said Malleson, quietly. "It was a shock, of course; I told my daughter Rene, but the others are still ignorant."

"Was that wise?"

"My health, you know."

"Yes."

"Well, with such a heart as mine one doesn't want to leave things. . . ."

"Your heart is giving you trouble?"

Malleson laughed. "I live by accident, not by my heart! Doubtless by all that's known of human anatomy I should be dead."

A cruel look flashed over the physiognomy of the visitor. He licked his lips.

"As you say, perhaps things should be settled;. I am sorry if you are feeling ill." He began to untie the pink tape of a bundle of papers; his fingers fumbled with the knot—rough, square-tipped fingers, like the unfinished clay of a sculptor's modelling. They were of a similar grey colour.

"Allow me," said Malleson. The knot was untied in silence, yet when the papers were freed and spilled themselves over the table, their ticketed neatness conspicuous among the litter of the scholar's notes and pamphlets, they had a horrid suggestiveness, like the view of policemen in a gay procession, emphasising the presence of law and therefore of possible crime—of something underneath the gaiety, beauty and colour and fresh air and happy spectators, garlands and flags—perhaps roughly-handled human beings to be huddled away to prison places amidst the sound of a hurraying people and the shrill noise in the open of fife and drum and clattering brass.

Malleson only fingered them.

"There are enough!" he said whimsically; "it seems that even ruin does not suffice, one must trace the procedure in and out through these folios to substantiate

the horrid fact." He moved restlessly, hesitating to examine the things. He took up one or two at last and glanced through them. The great obnoxious man watched surreptitiously.

"Did you not know of this coming failure, Crawley, of the bank? What of your own money?"

"I have been fortunate."

"You withdrew in time?"

"I withdrew."

"Then why in God's name did you not give me a hint?"

"There wasn't time."

"You mean there wasn't enough for us both?."

"There was not enough for everyone."

Steadily they looked into one another's eyes.

"That's the horror of it," said Malleson, "all the unhappy petty depositors cleared out, I suppose! Perhaps on the whole I am glad I am with them. . . ."

"Someone must go to the wall—you know that," he stared with his prominent eyes at the microscope at hand as if to bring the thing to witness the necessity of such shortcomings in the world's affairs. Malleson understood his meaning and shuddered, not in any way because he agreed, but because the man before him symbolised in some subtle way all the horrid evil apparent in nature through biological research where spirit is ignored.

"I must go into them," he said coldly.

They sat a long while over the papers. The visitor's still watch resembled a great spider's over his miserable victim in the web. He never moved. What the papers did prove was that Crawley might have saved the ship not once but many times, so difficult is it to keep a straight account of crooked business! Step by step this man had ruined his patron. It was all traceable enough to the keen brain of the scientist, though an excellent display of figures made plausible the supposed expenditures. Malleson had inherited his affairs from his brother, and they had been in the hands of this manager, whom he had instinctively distrusted, from the beginning, but it had not dawned upon his consciousness that one need feel any liking for one's man of business. He was not himself a good man of affairs, for the simple reason that he had never set his hand to such matters, now too late turning to them he found all monstrously plain enough. This hated man before him, this creature for whom his daughter and himself had experienced such an antipathy—(actually taken him in their philosophical hypothesis of the cosmos for a natural fact of evil), had undermined them slowly and surely and silently. So it is that we always trust to the good even in the most evil person we know—God wot the world could hardly go on if we did not.

"You are a wonderful man, Crawley!"

The scholar was pale to the lips. "Have you then a way out of all this?"

"You will have to sell Donnington."

"And then?"

"You know best—you have friends, I presume."

"What will be left to me after the sale of Donnington?"

Crawley affected an interested attention. It was impossible to trace by his expression what answer he would give. He turned to the papers and perused them, his horrid eyes actually scanning the writing he had no need to read—as if the documents and not himself were the authority.

"You see!" he pointed.

Malleson laughed. "I do see, there will be nothing. Crawley, had this bank not broken I suppose I should have remained in ignorance of all this! It would have been upon my wife and daughters that the gradual ruin would have come—yes, it would have come—you meant it."

"That is absurd."

"But why you meant it, God only knows! Your kind have to— Were you not rich enough?"

"I don't follow you. Everything is in order—of what are you accusing me?"

"Everything."

"This bank has ruined many families. In what way am I concerned in all this? I have endeavoured to administer your very poverty-stricken estate—with a little more time had this smash not occurred I would

have got things in order, unfortunately capital is needed—there has been ill-luck."

"You are always asking for capital, but I do not see any results from the constant expenditure."

At this the bailiff rose with some attempt at anger, but his anger seemed an empty thing. His enormous personality dominated the situation, he did not care twopence that his client should think him a robber. He was simply bored that his very explicit statement should not be accepted without at any rate any blame to himself.

"You might have done better," said Malleson, lamely.

"That is easily enough said by the man who has not had the administration."

"I accept your rebuke—I have not had the administration. There was my huge, childish, unpardonable fault and I am weak enough to blame you. I apologise, there is nothing more to be said."

A look of stupefied relief came over the bailiff's expression.

"These last few years have been disastrous for the land everywhere—by the bye, those mortgages are due."

"Well, there is nothing to meet them."

"Donnington!" he repeated.

"That's impossible."

"You know best. You perhaps have other resources. The mortgages, unfortunately, must be paid at once."

"Who holds them? I notice the holder's name is not mentioned here."

"I wish it could make any difference." He got up and explained his necessity of going—he had so much to see to. He spoke as a master rather than a man of business employed on other people's affairs, and moved without ceremony to the door, carrying his well-dressed ugliness with a certain authority.

"Who then holds the mortgages?" persisted Malleson.

"They have passed into my hands and I am pressed." Then he was gone.

A sudden rage possessed our scholar. The thing was like a nightmare. He was in this man's hands. The failure of the bank had, of course, been his ruin. But something surely might have been left. He turned again to the papers. There was the sale of the seven-acre piece. He had told Crawley to get rid of it to meet obligations. "You will get a better price than I," he had said, and now the figures were before him it was simply no price at all, and so through the whole administration of his property, page after page of entries with deficit ever at the end of the column. He paced the room slowly, a pathetic, bent figure, straining a mental vision to catch a glimpse of some thread towards extrication. Wave upon wave of pain pressed through his frail body so that he had to renew his mental focus with each stride, able only to grasp the awful truth of

beggary. The mind returned always to that. He sat down and clasped his hands between his knees to somehow arrest the feeling of physical weakness.

The girls! his wife! Rene! How could they and she face the world? They would burn her for a witch —he murmured the phrase meaning, as we know, the danger from their species creatures are in, who differ from their kind. Through all his mental suffering of the previous day he had held to the idea that there would be something left, that his fears to the contrary were simply fears, the hope behind the fears had made them possible to bear. He only realised now how much in truth he had counted on things, after all, not being so bad. Again he appraised his own capacity for work. His eyes wandered over the subtle instruments about the room for scientific research, he summed up his own powers and knew himself great in knowledge beyond most living men and there was no value in it all! oh! absurd reason, because it was too valuable. He could not sell a sheet of the labour of his brain. The world would buy all things but wisdom. . . . The survival of the fittest! . . . he smiled—Crawley would survive! The ignorant, debauched thief would survive —crush out the fitter thing all the days of his existence. His road was one of destruction, and he and his kin were to dominate! Was this to be always—through the long centuries of existence—the survival after all of the unfit? But death did not surely end things—

Death! the word repeated itself over and over. He was pondering on it as it moved through the universe—Death, relative to all things but himself, the mystery of changing existence; suddenly the word remained without further meditation, knocked at the door of his ego. What now? . . . . He looked over his shoulder as if someone had entered the shadowy room. It was growing dark. He tried again to pursue the detached philosophical contemplation, but the idea knocked again for admittance of a more intimate kind. He, who had pondered on this great change, faced it in his learned researches, and unflinchingly, when his physician had told him the incurable nature of his heart trouble, experienced a sudden fear of this unexpected presence. If, in any case, he had not long to live, was he to meet death in this other form more terrible, more awful than any? Had he the courage? The knocking need not repeat itself now. He knew his visitor. With the sudden engulfing horror was the keen excitement of having found a way out—of saving so easily his dear ones—his enemy was not to prevail. How long, after all, had he to live?—with this bankruptcy, hardly a great while. Oh! the choice should not be difficult! He repeated this to himself, his eyes glancing furtively now and then before him as he had to see his death as a presence, the animal of him shrinking as his reason persisted that it was only what he had daily expected.

At his death the insurance would be paid! They

could never prove his suicide, so little it would take to overstrain his heart. Would he be defrauding the company? Technically, yes—he must take that upon his soul, and he smiled. They have had a good premium for years enough and he might die any day now, but it should be at once, my friends, and he hugged to himself the thought that he was to be naughty for his wife and children's sakes; not only was he to give his life, but to defraud the insurance company, and he laughed. Really a gentleman! A man of honour!—and the humorousness of his honour counting against the lives of those dear women threw him again into the philosophic reflection on the ethical balance in the world's morals.

As his mind had fallen upon this thought of suicide he had accepted it as the saving inevitable action; the fact, not the choice, had dismayed him for the moment, this onrush, as it were, to certain death. It was not to be the suicide of a wearied soul, or of one ashamed of disgrace; his bankruptcy could bring little disgrace, he had had no hand in the horrid ruin, not only of himself but many families—the world's sympathy would in that be his; it was to be no act of cowardice, of shirking any bearable responsibility, but a saving action—a building up, as it were, by his death a home for those he had brought into the world, to whom the laws of his country gave no protection, and the only support he could offer was his death.

He moved now towards a small safe in the wall,

unlocked the heavy door and fumbled among the papers. There were few enough, with others a small bundle of letters tied with an amber ribbon. In seeking the paper he required he must lift it, and he did so tenderly, keeping the little bundle in his hand a moment. They were letters his wife had written to him in the long ago, during their courtship. Long ago. Oh! it was only yesterday surely? He saw himself a boy, poor, absurd, with a big head and a meagre body, holding in his arms that girl, her person fluttering like the wings of a bird, half-frightened yet nestling closer for, oh! mysterious beauty, the protection of his love.

"Know it, know it, my life is all yours," he had murmured. Tenderly his hand tightened over the packet. He would have faced death for her then. Well! well! he was to do it now!

The packet slipped from his hand and he took up the paper he was seeking. Eagerly he read the thing through. It was an insurance policy dated thirty years back. Year after year he had paid the premiums. The policy was settled upon his wife, no creditor could touch it and at his death through bonuses, etc., the amount would reach fifteen thousand pounds. He again went through the papers upon the table and perceived that two obligations of no inconsiderable sums would be negatived by his death and Crawley would be the loser. Minutely he went through it, all proving again and again that the only way out was by his death.

Was he not already doomed? Was he to cling to a few more months of life on such awful conditions and then to leave his wife and girls destitute? Ah! there was no question of choice! Neatly he arranged the papers, tied up the preposterous bundle Crawley had brought, whose fat, impotent fingers had failed to loosen the knot which held together the laboriously written pages proving the completeness of his ruin.

As he tied the tape up, fascinated into making it symmetrical, the physical wonderfulness of life caught at his senses, life, just life—not existence with all its intricate, civilised demands, with this condition or that, but simply *being* with the beautiful power to do things irrespective of need—to wander through a wood at sunset, to whittle a slender branch, to come unexpectedly upon human beings in some quiet place, throw a "good-day," held with muscle or wit to get over some physical difficulty—a cart wheel in a rut, or extricate a young heifer from a ditch, to smell in the air the rising odour of coffee, to drink and eat when hungry, hunger of the body, hunger of the soul, desire, *the struggle for life*—in the struggle *was* the life, amazing activity!

Poor, or rich, he was a dead thing who ceased to struggle, who ceased to care! Better to suffer pain than to suffer nothing! What then could it matter, this ruin? Could he not take his wife's hand and tell her that, poor as they would have to be, they had, after

all, the richest thing—life! Could they not go out of this civilisation that demanded houses and service, table-cloths and frilled doilies, and go together through the woods towards the sunset? Ah! with Rene, yes!—*they* might tramp as beggars, and in the storehouse of their spirits find fodder enough for happiness and life. The thought of Rene for the moment unmanned him. He closed his eyes. Child! He dared not even tell her he had to go. She would understand, wise child, if she guessed—never even let them know. They could not follow happily, Rene! They would die under privation; they had been used to the nest, their wings were stunted, they would fall bleeding, bleeding, wounded—the world can so horribly wound the poor, and they were of the world, and we, Rene heart! are of the earth, you know, and like the feathered things of the earth, our wings are strung.

"Father."

"Well, little one."

"He has gone then?"

CHAPTER XI

RENE knew at once on looking at her father that Crawley had brought the worst news. The pallor of his face and the shifty look in the lowered eyes, as if he dared not meet her glance for fear the facts would out, told their story plainly enough. So sensitively did she realise the truth that she found it difficult to enter into it all too closely, for it seemed that he had been hurt enough, and that she must distract him temporarily at any rate from the whole business. She lost sight of any sense of their immediate misfortune in the sudden consciousness that her father was suffering physically in his trouble, and that nothing mattered but to reassure him. She moved to the table to arrange it, collecting some loose sheets of notes they had been making. Her eyes moved among the scattered things with the casual interest of one not deeply concerned in what she was doing, rather ready to find some distraction among little things which the overburdened mind instinctively seeks. As she touched the papers she became suddenly alert. The insurance policy with its big capitals caught her attention. Like an animal unexpectedly on scent she stood rigid. Slowly she lifted her eyes to meet those of her father; his were bent on hers questioningly. Did she perceive in them, or was she mistaken, a look

of fright? A faintness spread through all her veins, she controlled herself with an effort, her limbs quivered. She moved from the table, not finishing what she was doing. The unspeakable thought was paralysing. She would be impotent against this thing! She knew now that she must talk of the whole business—for his sake she must, for all their sakes get at the truth and hold him back from that monstrous sacrifice. Of course, she might be wrong! She must be wily, it were possible to put the vile idea into his head. That at all costs must be avoided.

She continued to pile up the papers, including the horrid thing with the others. It was a different shape, its end stuck out. She doubled it casually and again caught the watchful look of her father. He lightly moved a hand out as if to take the thing and then desisted. She asked herself why? with a fresh flood of suspicion. There was a tension of silence between them.

"Is everything gone?" she said at last.

"Well! well! we must see to things."

"Don't hide it from me."

"No, no, my child, of course not . . . affairs are bad, you know; that miscreant has mismanaged scandalously."

"Can't we prosecute him?"

"No, it's amazing how he makes it all out—I am in fault. I have never seen to things."

"You have been at work," she said beautifully.

"Work!" he rose from his place and began fingering his notes. He looked at the thick MS. of his book nervously.

"It isn't finished!"

"Well, you didn't mean to until the autumn."

"No, of course not."

"We must go on."

"Oh, don't expect too much of me."

"I expect the book!"

He started at the tone of her voice. For a long time he was silent.

"So much has to be arranged now with this smash. . . . I shall hope to save Donnington for you all."

"What does Donnington matter?"

"Why do you say that?"

"I don't want you to save anything that will cost you sacrifice."

"Sacrifice!"

"Your work! Will you tell the mother and girls?"

"No," he said sharply.

"But they must know at last?"

"No, no, they need never know quite how bad things are if we are clever, Rene. I count on you, I count on you."

A cold certainty gripped at the girl's vitals. Was he appealing to her to help him in his secret intention?

"What do you propose to do?" she cried.

Her tone betrayed her, he was on his guard in a moment, even a natural colour came back to his pallid face.

"We must sell everything, all the land—that will make a considerable difference. Oh! there are resources. One couldn't be left quite with nothing, you know!"

Was he speaking ironically?

"That would be better than—"

"Than what?"

"I suppose the strain of saving things . . . you are not strong enough."

He caught at this.

"Well, I am not strong, Rene!—Come, you know that—you have all known—we don't talk about it, eh!"

"You have been much better lately," she thrust in.

"Pooh! Up and down, you know. I am not likely to get better."

"You will get better!" Her eyes were upon his, defiant. They held each other's look, but she failed to read his intention.

So the queer, terrible battle between them began. Gradually as the days went she became convinced of his purpose. He was going to kill himself that they might have the insurance money, and nothing she could do would stay him. Suspicion only, at first, which

deepened with every new occurrence: she watched him, and caught him surreptitiously doing the same to herself. The unspeakable sadness of his eyes at these moments stirred her almost to cry out; yet he acted wonderfully enough, at times actually making her disbelieve her own fears when the reaction from them forced her to a temporary gaiety, he becoming responsive to her moods; but these did not last long—the two became silent suddenly and a dread fear took possession of her again. How was she to act? What could she do? She forced out, in her talk with him, a thousand subtle reasons against such an action which he must understand were suicide, his purpose, and at times she thought she had made some impression, for he became reassuring and spoke of work to be done. Never openly, however, did she broach the subject.

On his part he guessed that she was suspicious, and it added to his great burden of pain. He must circumvent her somehow—she must not know the truth—put the thing off till she grew unsuspicious and would take his death as the others would, simply as heart failure. Unfortunately the insurance would be shortly due and there was nothing to meet it—a few more days and he must find his opportunity, otherwise his thirty years' payments would be wasted and his death possibly take place a week or a month after just the same. He wondered—Would that be? Nature defied science in a

wonderful way. No doctor would give him any assurance of even the shortest period of safety, yet two years had passed since his condemnation.

. . . . . .

"I suppose your money was safe out of this bank before the smash?" The question came from his wife.

"Part of it was in," he said.

"Then you have lost some?"

"Well, yes."

"You have been worrying!—It isn't serious, is it? I mean it won't make a great difference?"

"No—we will have to sell some of the land."

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"I did not wish you to worry."

"But it won't be very much?" she persisted.

"No, no."

She looked at him gently and then into the fire. "It might have been worse, Basil!"

"Yes."

"It would be dreadful to lose everything. I suppose some of them have?"

"Yes."

"Oh! I thank God it isn't so with us . . . perhaps I am too glad. I am frightened of poverty—We have lived so long in this old place. How absurd it is! The horrid fancy occurred to me a little while before you

came into the room—What if we had to lose it all!—and my heart stood still—I couldn't face it. I think it would kill me, Basil."

"You mustn't have such absurd fancies."

"Oh! I know if anything serious had happened you would have told me."

"Of course."

"Have you noticed anything the matter with Rene lately?"

"What is the matter with her?"

"I think she cries when she is alone; you know what a peculiar child she is—unapproachable—one does not grasp what is the matter."

"Cries?"

"I hope she doesn't care for that young man."

"No, no—I don't think so. I thought it was Evelyn . . ."

"I don't know," she answered wistfully.

"Does she cry often?"

"The girls tell me so—only the last few days—she hardly speaks to them or anyone."

"Oh! but she has been with me all the time."

"Yes, well that's what I thought—you have been working her too hard, I expect."

"Yes, I must have been. I'll go and find her now and stop her working."

Crying—crying—so Rene was crying for him! And how could he disabuse her mind—God in heaven! what

could he do? She never left him—watched him, poor child! What did she think she could do against such a decree?—Would not he, if he could, get out of the thing!

He lingered in the hall, he hoped some stranger might call, he wanted to hobnob with someone from whom he had nothing to hide, even with the queer soul who had such an old face and wore so young a false front! —just to gossip as other people did—as he had never done—to escape into a simple life, as it were, from this dream of pending death. He wanted, in this cold circle of necessity, a human note of unconcern.

He went aimlessly into the garden. The flowers with their upturned petals, the dark yew hedges and the planned brick paths seemed knowing, silent witnesses to the conspiracy of things against him. Matter became spirit—spirit, matter. Atoms of the universe dispersed and reunited.

He heard voices not far off and hastened towards them. Two labourers were arguing slowly as they lifted their spades full of earth and tumbled the soil into a barrow. Any word at all out of the quite ordinary they repeated several times, looking tremendous wisdom from their eyes; such substantiality counted at any rate honour to its side. The other would repeat it with respect but rather as if such advantage was outside argument, though it must be matched with something as fine sounding, however inappropriate! yet the

discussion was not nonsense. A simple slang would cunningly get to the point at last.

Malleson desired passionately to sit on the barrow and talk with them, but he went on, his pulse beating a little quicker as he neared them, a little slower as he passed.

Rene found him pulling weeds in an out-of-the-way corner.

"Which would survive here?" he said. "Which would survive if I did not interrupt it?—Then there is interruption in Nature! interference against the strong—spiritual interference!—Which will survive now! Ah! we will interfere with Crawley, eh? . . . Your mother says you have been crying: what do you mean by it?—Frightened of this absurd smash? Pooh! what do we care, you and I?—We can master the body, can't we? Are you weak, then, that you cry? You, my comrade!—What's to-day or to-morrow?—There is all time! There is a spiritual interruption in things outside material growth or evolution . . . or the world would be stupid—weeds and the rest—Spirit always interferes.—You have been overworking, that's why you cry!—You must go out more. I shall insist! Look here, I can't carry on things if you don't help." He looked up at her and saw that her attention was arrested by a broad shadow that fell across the path, and in a moment the heavy figure of a man bore down upon them.

CHAPTER XII

RENE spoke first: "Oh, Dr. Martin!" The big suave man smiled at her.

"What ghosts have we here?" he said, glancing from one to the other. "Time I came, Malleson,—you look shocking! I won't have such ghosts."

"Pooh!" said Malleson, shaking his hand warmly, "it's a good time to see ghosts. Ghosts! what are they but the manifestation of spirit? Rene and I are spiritual persons," and he laughed. "Where have you come from? I thought you were up the Nile?"

"Well, I'm back again, just in time it would seem."

"What do you mean?"

"My dear friend, you want looking after."

"Very well, you shall do it. Come in, I am really glad to see you. Tell me about the Nile?—What did you think of it—the old, old river? I am glad I have seen the Nile." He leant heavily on the doctor's arm as he moved towards the house. "No one is quite the same as the rest of the world who has been up the Nile."

He talked, gaily, wonderfully, and the doctor who watched him hardly spoke at all. Malleson, not himself, it was, who gave the vivid description of the ancient

country. Martin had arrived direct from there, yet the wonderful scholar on the precipice of death threw out the keenest revision, as it were, of these very travels; and when at last the doctor took his leave, in his thoughts there remained pictures of a world's history —pageants as if passing before his eyes of live crowds in their century accompanied by the interrupting consciousness that his old friend was very near death, and further, that the girl by his side was undergoing some abnormal struggle which was affecting her in a physical way, astonishing and unprecedented in his experience of organic possibilities. Beneath the pale face, under the heavy tow-coloured hair, looking out from behind those strange, almost red eyes, trembling under the movements of the slender white hands and the sway of the narrow hips stirred a force overwhelming, staggering, and not spiritual. This he asserted over and over again to himself; what he had perceived was a physical phenomenon. He had returned from the land of mystery, of the great silent desert, with its sinister hidden movement, the movement of a universe visible, as it were, over the receding plains; from a race whose dusky, furtive eyes seemed to withhold a latent power imprisoned by some magic, whilst the white man was to have so queerly his innings, and force his absurd civilisation willy-nilly on all peoples. Deep and inexplicable had been his impression of the great East—but the whole was illusory, suggestive only before the

actuality that met him here on his return in this remote corner of England, in the person of this strange child, and good God! what was happening?

Malleson had acute heart disease and was a doomed man, but there was something else—was he in time to avert disaster, and to save the girl from some unknown horror?

Or was it simply that the East had got into his brain? Was his imagination running riot, had his sensibilities been hypnotised during these four months' inactivity, under the blazing sun, or beneath the deep blue firmament of night with its challenging glitter of myriad stars, wave upon wave through infinite space —was he drunk with all that? He threw his thought back into the room where they had sat and talked, and felt again, as it were, what he had seen, and knew it had been as real and as inexplicable as that great hot atmosphere lying over the desert, and the spanning arches that reached from his thought to those same distant stars.

He caught his breath and strode on, cracking the brittle pine cones with heavy feet.

He would return on the morrow. He would find his old friend himself again, and the girl!

He did not however return, being called away on matters that were important. He sent a prescription that should do all the work that was necessary for Malleson, relieve the strain upon the heart and quiet that

nervous brain which like a magnet drew knowledge to itself willy-nilly and became overloaded.

Malleson meanwhile knew that in Martin's return he had a formidable enemy to his purpose. The kind great fellow, with a suspecting eye on the very threshold of his welcome, would worm things out of him to deplorable results. Well! it had been good to see him again, and he would look after Rene—he must always look after Rene—Malleson paused in his thoughts at this, saw, in a future, of which he was to take no part, Martin's protecting Rene against herself. Was it not what we all wanted most? Help against ourselves? Human interference far-seeing, forbearing on our side, as it were, against oneself—a subtle need!—and ironically enough human interference comes most often against us—Rene's fighting would be to the death. Child Rene! At any rate she should be protected by all that he could do. But how, he still asked himself, how to disarm her? Martin had said she looked unwell, he must send her out. She never left him alone since she had seen that wretched paper. Once having done so she would have less fear, believing that he meant to take his first opportunity of her absence. That was an idea! She would return and find him there at work, and so would regain confidence. Yes, he would send her out that afternoon.

She turned pale when he asked her, and the heart of him went sick.

When she was gone he could do nothing. He regretted having sent her. She would be suffering all the time. He wandered aimlessly about, wished Dr. Martin were there, and wondered if he should ever see him again. He found Evelyn in the library, and the painter man. They were poring over an illustrated work of Blake's—the strange drawings of that most wonderful of men.

"He is the only artist that could have drawn your sister. Doesn't he suggest her?" Grey threw out.

Evelyn's head went closer.

"Yes, I see what you mean."

Malleson withdrew, tiptoed away. Would not his anxious face frighten them? He went up the stairs slowly: alone in the study the afternoon grew horrible. There was to be another day like this when he would not expect her back. The moment came when he felt—*let this suffering end—let it be now!* Then he steadied himself to patience. No, what he had to do must be done without horror and misery to others. God in heaven! was it not for them that the thing had to be done at all? Was he so to bungle things—hurt them irretrievably? He listened for her return, longed for it. It was quite early yet; but perhaps she would come soon. There was a sound on the stairs—no, it was someone passing through the passage! Still another short time to wait.

Then he knew she was coming. She was leaping up

the steps. She always came like that, but not so swiftly. Poor heart! she was anxious. He wanted to call out, but knew it were better not to. He must not appear concerned. Ah! why wasn't he doing something? It was dusk and he was sitting waiting. Her white face appeared suddenly at the door.

"Father, you are all right?"

"Why! yes, why not, you goose? What did you suppose had happened to me?"

She sat down on a chair at the table and leaning her head on her hands began to cry.

He dared not console her, he could not command himself. He stretched a hand towards her.

"Hush, hush! you must not cry like that. We have a lot to see to, a lot to do, Rene. Why are you crying? After all, money is not all."

"Oh! it is not that," she said.

"What is it then, my child?" he asked in a tragically insincere voice. Did they not both know the thing that was between them?

"You are braver than God!" she said.

"After all," he explained with amazing hypocrisy, "you have known for a long time that my heart is weak—that I may be taken from you any moment." He did not notice, unhappy man, that they had not mentioned death.

She took her hands from her face and looked at him with wide eyes of dismay. "Death," he went on, "is

nothing. It is only a change!" And then catching the look in her eyes he realised his mistake. "But why are we talking like this? I have been going through things—everything will be all right in time; don't cry, for God's sake."

CHAPTER XIII

THAT such trouble could fall upon a house and be unperceived by its women-folk is one of the occurrences which happen daily and always fill us with amazement. That the person sitting next to you does not know whether your heart is broken, whether you are bankrupt, or homicidally inclined, surely is the miracle, not the reverse as generally is supposed. Thought transference is a fact, yet impenetrable barriers generally surround the minds of those nearest and dearest to us.

Evelyn and Hester were occupied with the new friend who had fallen from the blue, as it were, to settle in the neighbourhood and bring with him new thoughts and interests, not only in his strange personality, but through his very exquisite art. The unconventional dreamer created an atmosphere in the household that ousted tragedy.

Mrs. Malleson, as we have seen, had peered momentarily past the outward appearances of things and experienced a certain apprehension that matters were not all right, but her husband had reassured her. She was a woman who lived from hour to hour, and an assurance to her was the equivalent of a fact. On the edge of a volcano she would step with confidence if informed that volcanoes were only in eruption at a certain hour.

She had no curiosity and conventionality to her was actually life itself; what then *was* life if not a succession of orderly doings, and everyone's business a natural endeavour to fall into line! Any interruption in propriety shocked her sensibilities to incredulity. "*It couldn't be*" was her very simple reassurance. There was something beautiful in the very directness of her simplicity. She believed that she loved truth, but, if an equivocation settled matters in a more proper and wise direction, she plumped the lie with utmost confidence that it must be the truth. Her convictions were narrow, cruel, absurd prejudices; they failed, however, to corrupt her. She was a flower that drew from destroying ingredients its very loveliness, and the petals of her personality turned their wondrous beauty towards the sun, innocent of the corruption at its roots. That her husband and daughter were so much the antithesis of all that she was herself brought into her life the surprise and friction she supposed it was part of the human heart to bear. They were, of course, exceptions, and she carried about with her this mystery as her private secret. There were depths in the world not discussable—that was her delightful extrication. What could not be pigeonholed was not mentionable. *He* was, at any rate, a great man, and her daughter Rene was eccentric! From the gravity of her eyes one read no more of her conclusions. It would seem that she suffered at times before the passion of

Rene, quietly, shamefacedly, and was always more beautifully serene afterwards. She was cold and gentle, and because of this latter sweetness she was lovable to the thought, she demanded no demonstration. It would be inconceivable to meet her in an impassioned closeness, yet one desired to pay her homage. A pretty speech would bring a faint blush to her faded cheek which called out an instinctive loyalty. She was physically and mentally very little to anyone in her life, the idea of her was paramount, one went, nevertheless, one's way. The demand Rene made upon personality overwhelmed her not a little, and she took refuge in the thought that it would have been all well if her youngest had been a boy, having the delightful belief that the male could carry all peculiarities, shortcomings, even unmentionable wickednesses, as natural assets of his manhood. Of real wickedness she, of course, knew nothing, that was perhaps why she was unable to understand the possible awful consequences of her active prejudices.

As we have said, the tragedy that was stealing through the house was happily unperceived by her; the thing would pass, and the direness of it all would never reach her, only the most beautiful part of its sorrow, and we who write of her are glad that the real face of terror should never confront her, though for years the child who was doing so much to safeguard her from too great a distress was to bring a look into those quiet

eyes of a very moving fear, a daily apprehension that was to change her into the wistful woman she became in the latter part of this strange story. The strangeness is, of course, its reality, its miracle, its truth; the soul of Rene seems to us, at any rate, a symbol of the instinct of justice latent in us all, which, when rising to the surface, takes so often a physical rather than a spiritual manifestation. The instantaneous expression following the consciousness of injustice with individuals or crowds alike, is always physical, always movement, as fear on the other hand is immobile and waits to reason. So we see that this ineffable woman, concerned only with domestic affairs, moved through her household too often unconscious of bigger issues. She was capable, moreover, of queer little tyrannies in spite of a gentle administration, and could press obedience with an amazing persistence. Rene was only too aware of this peculiarity, and knew that nothing could save the situation if her mother persisted in sending her away from her father at this critical time. Surely enough in its most trivial form the thing occurred. She came to her with letters recently written.

Would Rene take them for her to the village?

Rene awkwardly resisted the demand. She put her hand to her brows that she might cover the sight of her eyes lest her mother might read the secret there, but how could she get out of this? What could she invent? Such a simple, absurd matter this posting of

quite unimportant letters, yet the very triviality of the thing was, in a sense, its necessity. Letters were written to be posted, however insignificant, and her mother asking her to post them meant that there was some difficulty in getting it done. The girls were out —the maids busy—

"You haven't been out to-day, Rene?"

"No," she answered, and regretted the admission.

"You are looking pale, the sun will do you good."

"I didn't want to go out this afternoon."

Her mother winced. "Well, I must have them posted."

"Yes."

She nevertheless hesitated, searching in her mother's attitude some weakness over the horrible letters.

"Won't it do this evening?"

"I never like putting off posting letters. I never do."

"For once?" she asked nervously.

"Really, Rene, what an obstinate child you are! You have no reason for not going out—only yesterday your father said with me that you were not out enough. Too much nonsense over books. It's absurd! Come, put on your hat and run along."

She spoke with finality and turned on her heel; the slight switch of her skirts denoted displeasure and firmness. Rene was not free to refuse her mother such a slight service. If she insisted on not going something

would be suspected and she must shield her people from the terror she had to bear. The tyranny of petty exactions was upon her now to an awful issue—the subtle interference of one being over another. She must give a plausible reason for not taking the letters or she must take them. And since the truth was untellable she could find no excuse. She had not their habit of little lies. Gladly would she have told one now—but what lie was there? She sought it with passion, nothing came to her. There was only one way—speed; her father might not know she had gone out—she must hasten. If only she could guard her father till the insurance date was passed—if only Dr. Martin would return! if only—

She went, and the moment she was outside the wall of the garden, ran like a hunted creature. Fear and haste became intermingled in her senses, and the necessity of speed a passion. Narrow-hipped and long-limbed she covered the ground more easily than a boy. Over the rises and falls of the grey moors, that seemed like baffling waves before her, breasting a crest, then dipping in a hollow, she at last lost all consciousness but that of motion, of the rushing air past her ears, and the earth seeming to speed beneath her feet, she herself becoming one with the elements.

Meanwhile Mrs. Malleson, glad that she had conquered her child's reluctance to go out, thought no more of the matter, but seeking her usual seat near the win-

dow sat down to work. Her coloured silks were beautifully arranged on carved pearl reels, which patterned the tray of an inlaid box of ebony. A soft light came through the curtained panes and caught at the bright things on the table and the edge of her gold thimble. There were no flowers in the room, but the scent of them wafted through the open lattice was in the air. There were flowers in abundance depicted on the carpet, wreaths of a faded pink on a pale white ground, and also on a fire-screen, very bright Japanese embroidery, and on the morsel of work she was doing. The room was full of peace and beauty as the shadows began to lengthen, the brightness of old things which had always been used, and the order of simple symmetry in arrangement. Nevertheless, to the solitary occupant of the room some sinister presence seemed there, an atmosphere unusual—disturbing, and the placent soul of her was moved to a consciousness beyond itself, as it were. She stirred restlessly in her seat. Her needle dipped in and out of the soft silk at intervals only. She spread her work out and looked at the coloured design of birds and leaves, whilst her thoughts wandered and then suddenly streamed backwards over years to her youth. She became aware that her heart was beating with a quickened action, whilst a faint sense of apprehension began to spread through her person. She had a desire to move but somehow could not, for the flow of her thoughts kept her still. The

shadows were deepening, soon she would not be able to see. Well, it did not matter! She stabbed the silk absently with her needle.

So long ago! So long ago! Yet it only seemed yesterday! She was a girl again hurrying through the garden. He was to be there at the end of the orchard. How she had been afraid that he would not be there! If he were not, she had felt that nothing then was true, nothing real, and that she would never, never reach him. Absence has horribly the power of negativing the past. How helpless, too, was a woman against the lover who does not come! . . . She lived the scene again—all the fear. . . . He had said that he loved her, but that such a wonderful thing should be rendered apprehension more stifling. What if it were not true! If he had not meant such speech seriously? Men were like that, it was said. . . . If he were not there at the end of the orchard—how live—how go on? Oh! One had suffered! The very thought of it now stirred one to pain.

She observed that it was getting dusk. She must not sit here and dream. She wondered where the girls were, Evelyn and Hester. They must be in the garden. It was turning chilly. Of course he had been at the end of the orchard! Why live the thing over again? All the pain! How her heart was beating! What was the matter? He had been there all right. . . . Was he not now upstairs? Up those winding stairs she seldom

ventured to ascend. She experienced an overwhelming desire to go up to him, and after some moments' resistance she rose hurriedly, her work fell upon the ground, she hesitated as to whether she should stoop to pick it up and put it away. She wanted to hurry, and was annoyed at the trivial delay. She stooped, however, and with trembling fingers picked up the material. Astonished at her own agitation she endeavoured to steady herself to a calm. What was the matter? What absurd impatience! Ah! now it was folded—there was plenty of time, why must she hurry? She turned slowly, a sense of real anxiety numbing her. She tried not to feel that she must hurry. What a silence there seemed everywhere. No one was about. What had become of them all? It was getting dusk, red streaks glimmered in the sky—the after-glow. She shuddered. Why did she feel so lonely?

At the foot of the stairs she began to quicken pace, fear now completely mastered her, and it was the old fear—fear that he would not be there. The stairs seemed interminable. She wanted to call out, which, of course, was quite ridiculous, and at her age would be indecorous. Moreover, why this eagerness? He might not after all be there! He might be in the library, or have gone out. He would, of course, come back again. . . . Still she hastened, for it seemed to her, as of old, that if he were not there he would never come back—that she would never see him again.

Oh! it was a long way up. She was unused to stairs; she stopped to get her breath, and then in a kind of dismay at having wasted so much time hastened on again. At last she was near the top. "Basil!" she called, and stood still listening. "Basil!" She thought she heard him move and went in. The door was partly open; she slipped through. In the fading light he came towards her, as he had long ago in the orchard, with open arms. A sob rose to her throat.

"Basil!"

"Little woman."

He sank down. Her frail arms could not hold him. She clung to him, kneeling on the ground. His head sank on her lap and the pallor of death stole quietly over it.

. . . . . .

Rene was on her return journey. Fortunately she had met no one. She had thrust the letter into the box at the white cottage on the confines of the village and without any halt sped back. Not for one moment had her sense of fear abated. Why had she been so weak? Why had she not invented any excuse? Fought any battle? . . . She saw her mother as an enemy. The slightly angry figure insisting upon such a triviality teased her imagination. Such petty tyranny with such an issue! There was no justice in the absurdity of it! But what sort of weakling had she herself been to give way? Yet what else could she have done? If

only given the thing over again, she couldn't have done it. Deeper intimations of tragedy swept through her being. She lost the mental sight of her mother—in a sense admitted the thing inevitable. Her mother was innocent, and became engulfed in a sensation of inevitable sorrow. Her speed increased—a terror-driven flight—then she stopped abruptly. She stood still as one listening, a convulsion swept through her body, a hoarse cry broke from her lips, and she leapt forward, her eyes like flames, resentful, tragic, determined.

The way seemed endless—the undulations repeating themselves as if controlled by obstinate cunning. The grey clouds rolled over the arch of the heavens amidst gigantic bars of light never topping, as the eyes expected, the old roof of Donnington. Dusk began to fall. The girl's pale hair, loosened from its hold, fell in wet strings across her face and over her shoulders; her draperies formed curves like those of a cockle shell; winged indeed she seemed, but terrible, and when she reached at last the old gate in the wall of the garden she fell against it panting, and bruised her hands in turning the great handle. She went swiftly across the garden to the door that led up the staircase to his room. She hastened up, little cries breaking from her lips; but she did not call to him as she had on the other time, and at the door which was half open she paused, she felt blind, but gradually in the dim light she perceived her mother crouching on the floor,

the head of her dead husband resting in her lap. The tears were dropping slowly down her faded cheeks, but there was no look of horror, no look to betray that she knew of the cause of his death. Her grief seemed peaceful, and the passionate agony that surged through the unhappy girl was a violence that was surely out of place here. She tiptoed across the room, and kneeling down at his feet laid her head upon him, crying out in stifled, terrible moans.

Would her mother not go away? Would she not leave her, lest she betray it all—tell out how he had died for them that they might live in comfort! Dead! Was it possible that this thing had happened? He was dead! Must she repeat the thing over and over again to believe? Not even the cold body seemed a proof. He would speak! Surely he would speak. The desire to cry out the truth beset her. Some justice to him surely must be done! How hold the words back? She looked furtively up at her mother from her crouching place. Her eyes were bloodshot and they glittered.

Mrs. Malleson started.

"Rene!"

The girl could not speak, she convulsively pressed closer to the body, and then lay still. Hurrying footsteps echoed up the stairs; the door was thrust open and a quiet voice sounded through the darkness.

"Where are you, mother? What is it? We have been looking for you."

Evelyn was in the room.

Mrs. Malleson got up in a dazed way. She took hold of Evelyn's arm and said pathetically, "The doctor."

"Father is ill?" said Evelyn.

"No, he has passed away, Evelyn." Mother and daughter stood in their sorrow looking down. "It's what must be done! Isn't it? He has been dead a long while . . . but I was here. He didn't die alone, Evelyn!"

Evelyn gently disengaged herself from her mother and knelt down. She took the dead hand in hers. It was cold and heavy. The tears streamed down her face, then she got up. She placed a cushion under the beautiful head.

"You must come down, mother. Rene will stay and we will send for Dr. Martin. He came back to-day."

"Oh! I'm so glad—yes, we had better go down—it is dark."

The two women went towards the door; they looked back as they passed through.

CHAPTER XIV

THIS change named death, this passing that is our common destiny, and that happens with unceasing monotony all the days of life, remains the unutterable surprise, the new unthinkable thing. No preparedness is preparation, no fore-knowledge of its inevitable nearness lessens the shock when the actuality happens. Dismayed anew before it, countless human beings to-day, as others through all the centuries, cry out the same denial—*It cannot be true!* Our incredulity at death is as vital as our intense faith at birth, before the little puny thing that is to live! Surely some intimation of immortality stirs one to this refusing of so persistent, so inevitable a decree. It is supposed that we get used to the death of a person we love. We do not, we simply forget it. We never accept it. Who ever says, *my mother is dead, my father is dead,* in whom the memory is still alive without experiencing a strange hesitancy and awe? Few speak of death to a recently-bereaved person; they shun the word that to a sorrowing soul must always seem a lie.

These three women, in the solitary house, pathetically without males other than the old servant, beat their wings one might say like agitated moths in an endeavour to accept not only the sorrow but the actuality.

Everywhere was silence, anyone passing from one room to another trod lightly. No one could quite look the other full in the face. James appeared before noon in his black tails and white cravat, an unprecedented occurrence; he waited ceremoniously on everyone, his old eyes had the look of tears in them that he must not shed. It was more possible to speak to him than to one another—to give some trifling order, and then wait in silence to seek some other thing to say.

Only the old man had seen Rene cry. In the evening's dusk she had crept down into the pantry and they had fingered together some cut flowers, then she had leant her head against the sleeve of his coat and cried dreadfully.

On the morrow of his death they had hardly been able to get her from the body. Hester came, a little indignant, to expostulate, but the child would not move, then Evelyn stole up. She stood by her side and waited, her flower-like face tilted wistfully, now and then the tears coursing down her cheek. She stooped at last and said, "Come with me, Rene," and Rene got up, but the sight of her face made Evelyn give a sharp cry, and Rene, as if hearing some sound from a distance, looked at her.

"What do you want me to do?"

"To be yourself, Rene. To be yourself!"

"Oh! and what is that?"

"You make our sorrow so much worse. Mother is ill."

"Ill? But she doesn't know."

"Know what, Rene? What do you mean?"

"I didn't mean anything. . . . Evelyn, I can't leave him."

The two girls stood looking at one another, and it seemed to them both that they could not go, they could not make the thing so definite as to turn their backs, leaving to such an awful solitude their beloved.

Hester returned and broke the feeling of unbearable tension. She stood with her brows knitted—for one moment Rene looked at her, and then went swiftly past her down the stairs. Hester had not meant to be unkind, she simply always was. She never for one instant in life looked beyond her own conception of things, or thought it ever necessary to hide her disapprobation.

Alone now with the body of her father she looked down and the tears welled up into her handsome eyes. She felt that Rene had been naughty and that her own decorous attitude in the death-chamber would be more acceptable to the dead father, yet on going downstairs and entering the room with the others she became hysterical, her body convulsed with tremblings, she could not understand it herself, and strangely enough it was Rene who came now to her side and, with infinite tenderness, held her hands. Her low voice poured out words of healing consolation like a chant. Gradually

the violence of their unhappiness subsided. They began to discuss things that must be done, and Rene, unnoticed, slipped away. She took her little white cap from its place in the hall, and looking at its whiteness thought of black. She went out, walking softly through the garden as if her footsteps on the very gravel were sound too much to bear; she slipped through the door in the high wall to pause facing the moor with the new awful thought in her heart: and Nature and the wind and skies all seemed part of it, overwhelming, destructive, busy on their business of uprooting, changing, meddling mysteriously with human doings, with this earth into which his dear body was to go. . . .

She started suddenly at great speed, moving lithe and monotonously over the rises and falls of the ground, reflectiveness gone from her face, a queer fire burning in her eyes.

At first, keeping an awful time with her pace, recurred the thought, He killed himself, killed himself, he killed himself—and for us! At last the monotonous refrain died and she became conscious only of her own movement, speeding through the tangibly resisting air, on, on forever. . . .

. . . . . .

Grey found her lying under some gorse asleep. He had seen nothing of the family since his long visit, the wonderful day first in the hayfield, and then in the

evening over the supper-table, when they had pushed back their chairs and in the pale starlight from the open window had talked, or had not talked, to an almost liquid harmony of peace, interrupted so violently by this girl's pale face looming out of the shadows at the further end of the room and in a glance strangely claiming his co-operation to hide from her sisters and mother an agitation she dared not explain. He had seen her on the morrow in the early morning when they had talked, and nothing had seemed real but the morning's beauty, her beauty and just the wonderfulness of being with her. He hardly knew what they had spoken of; a light wit had been there to warn him of something he had not entirely followed. Only yesterday he had heard the news of his host's sudden death, the man whom he had seen merely as a sympathetic frail figure passing through the meadow in the twilight.

He stood still looking down at her, wondering what he should do. Being a painter accustomed to working out of doors, he noticed at once that the ground was damp. Her face looked drawn and ill, and twitched as if in her sleep she were in pain. He sat down by her side and observed again that the ground was damp, and looked tentatively at a dry spot further off, but did not move.

It was a desolate part of the moor and miles from Donnington; there were heavy undulations and low-growing shrubs making the spot secret from observa-

tion. Grey heavy clouds were moving ominously. What if rain came? Would she wake up? On the horizon, however, were streaks of gold and pale green, emphasising the darkness of the rising ground. One felt one could step over the edge of the world there into space. He took out his pipe and began to smoke. He did not think of waking her. He recoiled always from interference, and now was hardly conscious of why he stayed. The warm tenderness that at times possessed him played through his pulses. He must see to it that no harm came to her; a bewildering responsibility possessed him as a child who suddenly finds itself left to some grown-up duty, and he stared before him in the silence. He did not think when he looked at her that she was a beautiful girl at his mercy, as it were, and that the chivalry of his manhood should be awakened by her helplessness; there was no sense of sex or adventure in the affair. What did affect him was the strange beauty of the whole thing—this grey moor, the translucent edges of the skies, the hood of darkness overhead and the strange, tormented girl sleeping. Her suffering seemed something of all the rest—inevitable; that she should be asleep in the cradle of the great earth in her sorrow was beautifully significant, and she became to him part of the mystery of the nature he was always watching, always trying to put upon his canvas.

He felt her stir, but did not look at her. He knew

that she would wake to reconceive her pain, and he could not bear to see the shadow cross her face; he turned, however, sooner than he meant to, but he looked away at once.

Wide-eyed she had had no need to recall sorrow. Sleep had done nothing to dull her consciousness.

"He is dead," she said to him.

"I know," he answered quietly.

"Oh! he is dead!" she repeated. "How can I bear it, if I only knew how . . . I could try if I only knew how. . . . I am frightened."

He waited a long time and then said, "Life is always frightening when the real things happen."

"I am frightened," she said; she watched him as she spoke, hoping, as all in great suffering hope, for the saving word. Again there was a silence, and the soft noise of little busy creatures reached them, a droning bee, a great coloured beetle rustling in some dry grass, a furred rodent gnawing at a root.

"Of whom?"

"Of my mother and sisters."

"Good heavens! . . . they seemed so good."

"They are—they always are. . . . You see, I mustn't tell them."

"What is it you mustn't tell them?"

"He killed himself. He died for us . . . that we might have some money. We were ruined, but he had been heavily insured for years—thirty years; it would

have elapsed to-morrow and he could not pay the premium. No one must know."

"Good God!"

"If anyone knew it would all be of no use—his sacrifice. *He was wonderful!*" She paused, and fingered the brittle long grass by her side as the tears welled into her eyes. "I suppose you would call it cheating?"

"No, it was a move in the horrible game of human finance. If he had paid money for thirty years he was justified in claiming something when his time had come. All finance is cheating."

"And life"—she turned on him fiercely. "Say it, say it—is it not all cheating?"

"No."

"Do people never love, that they can face death as they do? I cannot bear it—do you hear? I cannot bear it! What shall I do?—they don't really love, those awful people who shovel their dead wives and mothers and children into the earth, and wear crape for a day and a half. . . . Oh! and he did it for us, went away for ever and ever for us—and I am so alone. . . . No one must be told, but the knowledge of it will kill me—I can't keep it . . . it will kill me."

"Does it not help you that you have told me?" he said.

She looked at him oddly.

"You cannot feel it," she said.

"No," he answered simply. "I cannot feel it! It would be very terrible if I did . . . but I can hold it for you . . . your pain," he said.

"How can you hold it?"

"Because I cannot feel it—I can only see its wonder and beauty. . . . It is all I can see, the hideousness or beauty in life . . . and it is all wonder! . . . You have told me the most beautiful story I have ever heard—but it is not a story, it is the truth. Your father has died for you, it is like Christ."

"Christ?" she repeated.

He got up. It had grown almost dark.

"I am going back," he said. "I think I must take you home."

"It is dreadful to go back."

"But you must come," he said simply.

"Yes," she said. There was the tired note in her voice as of one spent; he put out his hand to her and they moved along across the down side by side. The painter, accustomed to wander for miles with his knapsack, peering for the secret beauties of the physical world, fell naturally into silence. They went for some miles so, and when at last the grey walls of Donnington in the distance formed a curve on the horizon she stopped.

"Oh! is it true? Is it true?"

"Is what true?"

"That he isn't there?"

"No," he said, "he isn't there. What does it matter? Place is nothing!"

She shrank to his side. He felt the warm, tremulous body against his own.

"It will be so lonely, and I have to face the others."

"Were you never lonely before?"

"Yes."

"One is always lonely. . . . Why are you afraid of the others?"

"I don't know! I am—they will do things."

"What things?"

"Things that I shall not be able to bear . . . he was always . . ."

"The living can make one awfully unhappy; you should do what I do."

"What is that?"

"Ignore them—wherever you are, live alone—live alone in a crowd—it can never hustle you then!"

"But I do, I have always—only I don't really care for solitude—it's like being in a prison where there are no walls, where there is no other side—no door—one cannot escape because there is nowhere to escape to."

CHAPTER XV

WREATHS and wreaths.

Official telegrams of condolence.

A Royal message.

And among the pile of letters a belated offer of a chair at a university.

The obscure scholar who had died to give bread to his wife and children was being honoured by a busy world—for a day.

Rene, her head in her hands, dug her nails into the flesh of her cheek as she sat brooding over the horror of it all. Could they not be quiet since they had been silent so long and leave the household to their dead? The grotesque white wreaths, immense wheels of waxen flowers, pressed by strange hands into such a shape for sale to honour any dead, were to her like ridiculing faces.

"What shall we do with them all?" she asked. Hester and Evelyn looked annoyed.

"Why, they will go with—with . . ." They feared to say him. The wreaths seemed very beautiful to them. Their father had been honoured by great institutions; what uncanny jealousy was it in their sister which created resentment at such offerings?

"You do not seem to see that it is rather late."

"No," they answered simultaneously.

"Why?"

And Rene dared not answer why.

"Do you think that anyone will come to the funeral? Has anyone been asked?"

"Yes, a few. We have no relations, you know."

"No, it's strange! Who then will come?"

"The few neighbours—Sir Thomas Williams, Dr. Martin; then there have been some letters. There will be one or two strangers from London."

"How terrible!"

"Well, they want to do honour to our father."

"Why didn't they come before?"

"We will have to drive with strangers."

"We are not going."

"Not going!"

"No, mother is not well enough—she does not wish it. There will be a lot of men and no women."

"Good God! what do you mean? What are strange men to me? Of course I am going."

"We are not."

"You said so. . . . I quite understand—but of course I am going."

"We don't think you ought to go."

"What do you mean by that?"

"We are not going," they persisted.

"As you have said—Why aren't you going?"

"We could not bear it."

"I am going."

"Rene, you cannot possibly go to the funeral!"

The girls looked at her almost angrily; their eyes were swollen and red with crying, they looked pathetic and delicate. It was difficult to cross them in such sorrow, yet it seemed to the girl so unjust. Why did they trouble at such a time to think of such resistance?

"Why can I not go?"

"Women ought not to go to funerals! It—it isn't right."

"Don't use that absurd word—don't you understand that I must go?"

"No, we do not understand—you will break down at the grave. You will make a scene—we are older than you are, and we should know best! Mother is ill. She sent word that it is her wish that we should not go."

"It is no use. I am going," said Rene. "I must go."

"You will make people think that we did not care for father; it will throw discredit on us—only you being there!"

Rene started. She looked wide-eyed at her sisters. That was their view then! At her father's death that was what they could think of!—as to whether they would or would not get the credit of being there. If she went she would hurt them bitterly—their vanity

over her father's dead body! Was she to hurt them so? She knew now she would not go; to create such an atmosphere was impossible; they did not seem like her elder sisters, but like two children begging her not to make them unhappy in some absurd way. Hester was even now crying dreadfully.

"Oh, it's all right. Of course I won't go—I won't go." She slipped out of the room.

Was it possible that such a thing could happen to her—that she might not go to her father's grave? A sudden storm of rage swept through her; then it passed, she went up to her room and sank down trembling.

. . . . . .

The funeral procession was not long. There were some private carriages from the neighbourhood. All the guests, however, walked. Three men had come from London, queer, round-shouldered, loosely-built men with fantastic features, near-sighted eyes and grizzled heads; they went to this funeral as they examined a species; they had but one manner for doing everything. They would have gone to a ball with the same shuffling gait and slightly embarrassed manner. Nature seemed to have revenged herself on these men, who pried into her secrets, by endowing them with grotesquely incongruous bodies, as if the constant assertions about the original ape had somehow affected their physique as well as their minds. They were not, of

course, alike; one was very tall and thin, another small and wizen, a third all but corpulent; their noses varied in their angles, but were generally of an exaggerated line, whether upwards or down. They were simply grotesque, all, with immense brains. As they followed the hearse across the moor they glanced surreptitiously at the scenery as a young girl might look at a strange man. The sudden notes of a skylark induced them to simultaneously peer upwards through their glasses, as if they were not quite certain that such music were not a fairy tale. A faint flush spread over their cheeks at the unusual exercise of walking over the uneven ground and now and then they stumbled in a rut, and always looked at one another as if to verify the fact that roads across moors were uneven. The hearse that carried the body of the man who was the most learned of them all, and the most human, was laden with wreaths from cities, and butterflies from the gorse hovered on them.

When the ancient church with its crooked tower and deep slanting roof was in sight on the edge of the horizon a sleek white hound overtook the cortège, and panting it would seem from a tremendous run slackened pace.

"The creature has some instinct of the truth!" said one philosopher.

And another said, "I doubt it—it's simply an unusual occurrence that it wishes to nose out."

"It is doubtless *his* dog."

"Well, of course!"

But on inquiring later the learned men could in no way substantiate their supposition. No one knew to whom the white hound belonged, nor had seen it in the neighbourhood.

CHAPTER XVI

A LAWYER from London had come down to take the dead scholar's affairs in hand. Crawley was deposed. They had a sharp encounter. The agent tried to keep affairs in his own hands, but had to accept the testator's declaration that he should entirely resign his stewardship. The contempt the London man felt, after having looked through the accounts, for this urban thief was displayed in a cold politeness that verged on insolence. He had to realise that in spite of obvious misappropriations the law could not touch the man. The little he was able to save from the wreck over and above the insurance money he screwed out of the agent by wit rather than actual right. He bluffed the countryman. Some subtle fencing passed between them. The white-faced lawyer spoke in a monotone that seemed as indifferent to the issue as it sounded apathetic, and the agent, mesmerised by the man's jargon of law, ceded points that Malleson could never have gained. Crawley perceived that this lawyer might move further into his (Crawley's) affairs if things went into court and the miscreant had no stomach for litigation.

The land was all sold, but Donnington and the gardens remained to the widow and her daughters with

a nominal income. The insurance was paid and everything was settled quietly, as if no great misfortune had ever hung over the unhappy family. The old scholar had not died in vain, and Rene, who saw things smoothing themselves out, had to hug to herself the knowledge she had of the great price all this had cost. The persistent thought that she must hide the horror from her mother was combined with an aching desire to shout the thing out. Tell them the pitiful, tragic story; but he had wished her not to, had so carefully schemed to hide his traces. How could she betray him? At first she was amazed before her own control. She was pitiful and gentle with her mother and sisters. In their first grief they found themselves leaning upon her unconsciously. She seemed stronger than they. Whilst they wept she sought means to assuage their sorrow, yet the look in her eyes brought the tears to theirs. If only she would weep with them, but she remained dry-eyed. Once only did she betray observable weakness. Hester had said, with some effort at consolation, "We knew he would die like that—it was wonderful he lived so long," and Rene had rocked on her feet, the blood fading from her lips so that they thought she was going to faint. They could not but help feeling that trouble had sobered her, that she was coming over to them, as it were, that there would be a better understanding between them. She was more amenable to the little things of everyday life, but as time went on their

hopes fell. When they no longer needed her a change came. It dated from the day of the funeral. They caught her looking at them with a passionate reproach mingled with fear; this fear communicated itself to them; they found themselves wanting to shun her. She entirely avoided them. If they met her in the dark corridors or on the stairs she would shrink against the wall, and her eyes glittered at them with an inhuman intensity. She spent hours alone in the attic study doing nothing, or went out for the whole day. She returned from her long rambles panting and exhausted, to seek some corner of the room, where they found her huddled asleep.

She stayed out a whole night. They didn't know of this till the morning, Hester having thought that she had seen her go to her room the previous evening quite late. She came in at breakfast-time haggard and distraught, her eyes like flames. They were so shocked they could not speak. Mrs. Malleson tried to remonstrate but could not, for the girl looked at her with the most pathetic and awful reproach. She remembered her goodness those first days.

"What are we to do?"

"I am frightened of her," said Hester. "We must see that she does not stay out at night."

"How?" said Evelyn.

And they looked at one another in dismay.

Some days later Hester sought her in the attic. She

burst into the room, heralding her disapproval with a whirlwind, as it were.

"You are a brute!" she said angrily. "You are killing mother. Are you mad?"

"Mad?" repeated Rene. "Why?"

"Everyone will say you are."

"I can't help that."

"But you can help making mother miserable."

"If I could—if I could." She pressed her hand to her side.

"What is it I do? . . . tell me."

"Do! Everything, everything," she stammered, and found it impossible to be explicit.

"You go out at night," she flung out.

"But you lock me in."

Hester coloured. It had been her idea.

"Isn't that a state of affairs? To have to lock you in?"

"You needn't," she answered. "I won't go out."

"You said that before."

"I had to."

"It is affected! You act! You like to make yourself conspicuous. It is not grief for father, it is vanity."

"Oh! don't. Oh! don't. Oh! don't."

Hester flung away.

Downstairs she said, with a bitter laugh, "She wants to know what it is she does!"

Both Mrs. Malleson and Evelyn repeated, "What

she does!" and there was a silence. What was it, after all, that she did?

An atmosphere of fear and distrust deepened in the house. The sorrow of death seemed to be superseded by these agitations, this nameless fear they experienced with regard to Rene. They became reluctant to speak of it to one another and the door was no longer locked.

One morning they met with blanched faces and the realisation of fear in their eyes. They recognised that the others had seen what they too had seen and that there was nothing to say. Mrs. Malleson clung to her daughters.

"It is horrible!"

And they shuddered, speechless.

CHAPTER XVII

THERE came a time, however, of peace. Rene had quietened. Mark Grey had interrupted the tension. He had, by something in his quiet presence, reassured them. His personality was strong enough to absorb attention. Evelyn was in love, but she spoke simply of a friendship, and, with the instinct of passion, persuaded her folk to take that view. She knew that she would lose her lover if she could not convince them of this. They were glad of his presence against the horror that had eaten into their brains, and he did not, to any extent, it would seem, fall in love with Rene. Mrs. Malleson, too, watched for this. They seemed to understand each other outside passion, at any rate visibly so. Evelyn was not jealous, nor Hester suspicious; things could not be anything but all right. Rene seemed like a submissive child in his hands; the strange fire in her eyes would wane in his presence, leaving only the sorrow that made it incumbent to shift one's look from her, and yet to glance back in some hope that one had mistaken its reality. They did not guess that he thought her the most wonderful, the most beautiful soul that man could dream of. Why should they, since he never even acknowledged the thing to himself

in any personal way? Was she not part of all the beauty he loved?

She meanwhile experienced the sensation of recovering from some long illness that was to leave forever its mark upon her. She was weak from excess of sorrow, and the effort to keep her secret mercifully tired her brain to an acquiescence that became automatic. She ceased to think, and sought solitude, not to brood, but to escape reminders, to escape from human intelligence, which held always the past as a kind of mirror before the present. She went through long spells of time when she felt that she was hardly conscious mentally, when only physical things affected her, affected her as part of herself, a protection against spiritual evil—of action against thought, of life resisting interruption from that sneaking schoolmaster the mind.

Mark Grey held the power, that a stranger so wonderfully has, of giving an unprejudiced sympathy, his negative nature touched her, as did the things of the earth; he neither questioned nor doubted, nor made any demands, only at odd moments became a protection between her and the little cruelties her family had a genius for inflicting—the power of the weak over the strong, the petty practical over the passionate and imaginative, from whom after all the finer practicality is drawn. We see her now bereft of her companion, who was, too, her father—a branch as it were torn from the tree, alone in a solitude that had to be, for a time at any

rate, impenetrable. Mark Grey knew that he could not really get near her, and to him she seemed more wonderful because of this inaccessibility—more with the things he cared for: the miracle of sunrise, of the mists on the moors, of the coloured world after rain, and strangely enough with all her aloofness it was possible to be intimate with her in a way he could be with no one else. One spoke just the truth to her, or remained silent. The pretences, the subterfuges, the mockery which the world habitually found necessary to assume, facing, as it is put, *the purity of women*, became impossible absurdities. She was a companion before whom one's thought could be revealed simply as it stood. The grossness of human nature, sin and vileness, were to her part of the movement of the world which was created. In her very purity she seemed able to reach down, thrust aside appearances, and perceive the cause of meaning even in sin. There was in her, the mother of earth as it were, she who carries in her womb, after all, the creature who may sin. She had a physical tenderness. Her warm hand would at times respond to the touch of his when these two wayward creatures had wandered together for miles and rested for a while in some sunlit place, on which violet shadows flickered, and running water made cool, and little creatures, squirrels perhaps, scurried to and fro, or birds that dared fly low, unused to human interruption, fluttered their wings quite near. Yet they were not

lovers, knew they were not, and held together in a kind of bond against the mystery of passion. They hob-nobbed in a mutual loneliness unquestioning. Evelyn was accepted between them as having a hold. He cared for Evelyn very tenderly, went to her for safety, loved her without passion, as it would be impossible to love Rene, saw her as his wife, not as his mistress.

During all this time Rene saw nothing of Crawley. The man, against whom her senses always physically revolted, and who had helped in so great a measure to ruin her father, had been mercifully absent, and the intensity of her sorrow had obliterated the consciousness of all other emotions. The beast was in his lair, as it were, and the scent of him lost.

The mental shock was none the less great, however, when unexpectedly she found him standing before her at the dining-room window, just as he had come on that morning when the scholar had humorously begged him only to stand out of the sunlight, and they had all laughed over the tubs. The strange fire, it would seem, kindled in her eyes. She turned from him in a trembling agitation, looking hopelessly along the empty room as if she must meet the reassuring look of the loved dead one. How dared he come! He who had caused all the sorrow in this home. How dared he smile at her—was he not afraid? That was the odd question that leapt uppermost within her. Was he not afraid? An awful power coursed through her veins. His im-

mense bulk seemed nothing to her. He was vermin, and she could destroy him. Yet he stood smiling horribly between her and the sun.

Gradually the smile faded, the pallor of anger spread over his coarse features. On either side they held each other's eyes alert and animal. There was an extraordinary pause. It did not seem that those two required to speak to enable them to communicate; a battle of sex was taking place—lust to possess the girl on his side, lust to destroy him on hers. Agile, and slender, she stood quite still, her nostrils distending, the beautiful curved lips just parted to reveal the edge of a glistening tooth. In silence primitive passions held them at vital tension. Then, sweeping across their heat, came the consciousness of everyday manners, a cool wave across the brain, which made it possible to speak as ordinary beings in a well-intentioned world—they slipped into the harbour of civilisation that, after all, was to save them both.

He took off his cap.

"I wanted to see you, Miss Rene."

"You wanted to see me?" Her voice was level.

"Yes."

She waited.

"Not here," he said suddenly.

"Why not here?"

"We might not be alone." He kept his eyes upon her. "The others . . ."

"The others," she gasped.

"There are things one would rather say alone."

"Oh! but . . ."

"Business."

"What business can you possibly have with me, Mr. Crawley?" She spoke quietly, which took the sting from her words.

"I have a great deal to say."

"You know that I have nothing to do with affairs —least of any of my sisters! Shall I call Hester or tell my mother that you are here?"

"Do you wish me to speak to her?"

"But what is it? What is it? Why not to my mother?"

The man's eyes moved from her to the horizon, a cunning look crept into them, they returned to meet hers with a new confidence.

"Something you can save her."

The girl blanched.

"Oh! take care! take care what you are saying!"

The man could not grasp the cause of her sudden dismay, but realised that he had gained his point. She would meet him, and by the fear in her eyes he guessed that she would be more anxious for solitude than himself, but why— Ah! he had a power over her then! The slender white witch would be at his mercy—the white-bosomed firebrand writhe yet under his power. The muscles of the man stiffened with sex-exultation,

he could hardly forbear from laying a hand upon her.

"Perhaps it would be better," he said thickly, "that I did not come to the house. I do not wish to trouble Mrs. Malleson."

"No, no. Of course I will see you."

He licked his lips. His eyes became suffused.

"This afternoon at the summer-house."

"Yes, that would do."

"At three o'clock."

"Yes."

"You will come?" A doubting note cracked in his voice.

"You say it is important."

"Yes."

"Very well." Her eyes still held the look of fear with a faint pleading.

He flushed, reassured. He took off his cap as he moved away with the hurry of the male who cares only for feminine society in sexual intercourse. He would have been at a loss to talk to any woman on any subject but business. He had gained a point which in his own mind must lead to all concessions. He went with a swagger and cheerfully whistled under his breath; he hit a frog dexterously with his stick, bruising the creature to inanition, and laughed. He had held the white witch in his arms once. He would hold her again and again. Her hand had touched his cheek—he

writhed sensuously at the thought of it. Little wanton, at the bottom of her! But he would have no nonsense. He gloated over the thought of the husband's right to chastise. Saw her white body quivering, and smiled as he had done when he had struck the reptile. As he approached his own place, a considerable property for an agent, the thought of having a mistress over it softened the man momentarily. The soul of him rose from out the muck of his flesh and experienced a sweetness in life that was confounding to the evil of him.

He stepped with a lighter tread up the short avenue that led to the verandahed cottage, and stood suddenly before a carousing brother who was seated outside at a small iron table. Deep in his cups, bloated horribly, with bulging eyes and loose lips, he only grunted an acknowledgment of the other's presence, who stood looking at him with a scrutiny of contempt.

They were extraordinarily alike these men, twins, only Richard seemed the reflection of the other; his whole personality was dim, almost blurred—he was different just by weakness, and in a spiritual waiting for a lead. No one ever mistook them for one another in spite of the likeness.

James Crawley scanned him now with a sudden realisation of his ugliness, and over his sensuous dreams there came a fog of doubt. Was he himself as repellent as that? They were uncommonly alike. Could a refined woman care for such a man? . . . He moved

away into the sitting-room stealthily to the mantelshelf and peered at his own countenance in a mirror. A faint shock of surprise came to him. After all, he was not so ill-looking. (What human being ever sees his own shortcomings as they are?) There was a resemblance, but his ruddy flesh was not, after all, in his sober moments, bloated. His features were regular, he did not look such a damned sodden fool as Richard. Women liked a strong man. Was he not strong? On this consideration he turned away to meet again the other reflection of himself. Richard was standing in the doorway watching him.

"What the hell are you grinning at?" he said.

His brother received the snarl with entire disconcern.

"What did she say?" he asked.

For a moment there was a silence. Then Crawley threw out:

"That she would meet me." And watched the effect of this on his brother.

"Lord! you had better be wily."

"Pooh! one has to be with all women, blast them!"

"She won't have you anyhow."

"You said that before."

"You are such a queer sight to look at, James, from a wench's point of view."

James grinned. "Whatever I am, I haven't a horse-scaring mug like your own."

The drunken man looked quite serious at this.

"We are alike," he said with sudden inspiration. "Not so bad either of us?" he said questioningly.

"Oh, you are drunk."

"I like to get soaked!" he answered mildly. "Have some, James."

The two returned to the verandah, and sat at the iron table with an eye on one another. James Crawley was excited to a passive mood. His brain, unused to any possibility of resistance to his will, was bewildered before the necessity of waiting in the dark, as it were. His brother had been his thing from childhood—the weaker vessel—yet behind his stupidity was a cuteness that the elder twin lacked. Richard was, after all, generally right when he chose to bring his besotted brains to a point, and he had for some reason condemned this wooing—always on the grounds that the white girl would get the better of them. To be got the better of was the one weakness these men could not stomach. Their peculiar hardness and savage cruelty to some extent arose from the suspicion of such a possibility, and became a cunning revenge against even a possible essay. Always on the alert for the enemy, they learned to strike the innocent that they might keep their hand wary, as it were.

They sat together now, hardly speaking, passively uttering an occasional remark prefixed by an oath. The garden above them was a very green place, hooded everywhere with creepers and thick ivy. There were

few flowers, those only that grew without care, perennials studding a side path, jessamine trailing over the ivy, and many birds in the thickets. The low verandahed house received the afternoon sun and seemed to drowse in the quiet. No bustling servants interrupted its peace, or noise of animals. The place almost suggested an uninhabited abode, or temporarily-deserted home, only that invariably one of the two brothers was to be seen on the verandah, which commanded a view of the short avenue of slender, melancholy poplars. On the round iron table was always drink, which the brothers themselves brought out. They were close companions, these men, and there had been no question of a wife, if installed, in any way interfering with their habits. The brothers were not to separate, but now James wondered if, after all, if pressed, it wouldn't be wise to get rid of his brother. The tie between them was strong. The peculiar attachment of twins seeming an instinct of personality rather than affection, as if they shared a soul. They could quarrel only as people quarrel with themselves; they had ill humours, and blasted each other with impunity, but never with the faintest trace of grudge or real ill-will, just as there was no perceptible affection, as a man would not love himself. Richard knew himself the weaker nature and was proud of the brutality of his brother. James, on the other hand, recognised, in spite of vice, a more sensitive nature in the drunkard than his own, and was

satisfied as he might be if he discovered that his own feet were smaller and better-shaped than his hands. He did not want his brother to go, but he would have to damn-well kick him out if needs be, and the thought made his eyes ferocious. Richard, catching the expression, admired the ferocity, unaware of its origin. His own bleary glance fired up in sympathy, and they drank on in meditative silence.

CHAPTER XVIII

LEFT alone Rene stood quite still. What did he want? . . . There came the remembrance of a hot, horrible face leaning over her, then the aspect of that darkened room, and the courageous woman, dying without fuss so that the starving children should not be scared over their food. . . . This man, this terrible man, was he always to have power? . . . What had he to say to her? Had her father somehow told him his intention? Surely not! Or let it escape him? Had Crawley guessed and meant to hold it over her? . . . Oh! she must face him! She had had to face so much, she must not draw back now. The sense of fight tingled through her veins, and the passionate resentment, which merged gradually into a surging rage, attacked her physically. She quivered as she stood alert and panting, then tiptoed out of the room to hide somewhere and wait.

At three o'clock she slipped from the house. Her mother was lying down, and the girls had gone out to paint. The afternoon was drowsing in a warm sunlight, the horizon scintillated in a purple haze—she thought of them as she went. How did they manage to make pictures, to reduce to so small a compass the immensity of Nature? She would never be able to even try and paint the coloured world. She would always

see the other side of the hill. She smiled to herself at the idea of the picture she would perpetrate—such a muddled perspective, and remembered that Mark Grey's work was, after all, like the side of the hill one didn't see.

She did not realise that she was too physical to be an artist—too material; she felt sensuously all nature, not any symbol that was outside nature, but the thing itself—the loosened winds, the responsive growing grasses, the movement of water, the mysterious energy that gripped for life unquestioningly. She possessed the sensuous body that would give itself in quick response with no puritanical compromise; the science of art was a little outrageous to her, the science of civilised life wholly so. Music alone stirred her—the sound of a voice singing, or a deep note struck on an instrument, heard some way off, became the physical delight that the patter of rain was to her on the hillside, or the hymning of birds in the early morning.

The summer-house was some way down the garden and hidden from view. It had a square window with a wooden shutter. When the door was closed the place would be quite dark but for this window, from the interstices of which the sun crept through. The shutter swung easily open, but was generally closed as the wide door enabled a flood of light to penetrate every corner. As with most summer-houses, it was unfrequented, and spiders and queer hurrying creatures made their abode in its rafters.

The girl stood on the threshold and did not at first perceive that he was within waiting for her. She entered, and half closed the door, afraid that her mother might pass up the path. He began to speak at once, and it was not for some time that she quite realised what he meant, for his words came with hesitancy and his voice was thick. Then she understood. He wanted to marry her. He was rich. Debts could be paid. Doubtless her mother would not approve, but Mrs. Malleson was not well off . . . there were things of which she was not aware that might be kept from her.

Rene found herself gasping, "No, no, it is impossible." She tried to be gentle to this offensive creature who told her that he loved her. He was horrible, but he was offering her all he had.

It was impossible, impossible, she repeated, and drew towards the door with a bent head. She paused suddenly, remembering the end of his speech.

"What is there that has been kept from my mother? I thought everything had been settled—that you were no longer acting for us?"

He looked confused. "Things cannot be settled so quickly—I could save things a bit."

"You use this as a bribe."

"I would do anything that would make you consent."

"Please do not say any more. I do not care for you at all. I do not think you should have asked me. Surely you knew that I did not like you."

"Why should I know it?"

"I don't know, Mr. Crawley, but you must accept my answer."

"I took my bailiffs off," he growled suddenly.

"Ah!" She remembered that moment of yielding and shrank back. "I was fighting for the woman's life. It was too late—whatever horrible bargain you imagine you made was annulled by her death."

Suddenly they were in the darkness. He had closed the door and his arms were round her. Intoxicated by the memory of that other time, he thought to hold again a quiescent girl, but in the darkened room a sense of horror suddenly crept over him. What was with him? The writhing body in his arms! God! He strained his muscles only to hold what was surely a superhuman, inimical presence. He fought, it would seem, for life, then the shutter of the window swung open and she leapt through it. Beads of perspiration poured down his blanched face. He stood still staring at the window, a square of sunlight, the drowsing landscape without. . . . What horrible thing had happened to him, and she! She! God in Heaven! He staggered out and stumbled along the path towards the wood like a drunken man.

Fate decreed that he should come upon the little servant girl, Phœbe, standing just across his path. She had put down her basket, which held sundry things she had purchased in the village, and unfastened the front

of her dress to arrange the little bouquet of flowers she had gathered on her way. She was a comely child, seventeen perhaps, with violet eyes and a mouth like a peony. She was singing softly and pressing the petals of the flowers with rough fingers, doubtless wondering at their velvet softness—stroking them as she cooed over them.

The dazed man halted, the presence of the child seemed to negative the scene he had gone through, make the happening unreal, like some nightmare interrupted by a sudden awakening. His hands went out as if to clutch at her to assure himself of reality. She blushed as he neared her. There was a momentary pause, then he took her roughly in his arms. "Girlie," he murmured thickly. Phœbe smiled, and into her innocent eyes came a look of happiness unspeakable. He thrust his hand into her dress and touched the soft little person of her, and she still smiled. He put her suddenly down and strode away—even now the horror of the other thing had not passed. This little warm bundle of a child had been crushable enough in his arms—she was human after hell.

Where had she come from, the little maid? What a blasted pretty baggage! Oh! he would go and find the creature again, she would slake the thirst that was burning in him. Meanwhile, to walk off the horror, to get himself again. He came out of the wood on to the moor. He walked hurriedly as a man trying to escape

from some unwanted consciousness. The physical subduing of a spiritual torment—breaking the back of a fear that was incomprehensible but still brought a cold sweat through his body. He walked till sunset. As the shadows lengthened he found himself starting at unexpected objects; he stopped at a wayside inn and drank deeply of brandy—no one was at the bar, and the man who served him was called away. He came out again in no sense warmed, and walked on.

Late in the evening he stumbled up the steps of his verandah. His brother was huddled in a chair, drinking. In the dark his face loomed out, red, bloated, awful with the fixed look of the drunkard, with the look also that drunkards at a certain stage of their potations have, of knowing the meaning of the universe, as it were, with the intention of keeping a dogged silence regarding it. Crawley, who was not drunk, remembering his prophecy of the morning, sank heavily down and stared at him.

"What the hell did you mean?" he said.

CHAPTER XIX

PHŒBE meanwhile sat quite still. The most wondrous thing had happened to her, a gentleman had kissed her, and a sense of shame so sweet to bear swept through her blood and dyed her cheek and neck and all her little person with a pink flush. She dared not move for fear of her own happiness escaping, and when at last she got up she ran home as fast as she could go, holding her breast with her hand, her eyes shining, and the flowers dropping from her dress as she went.

She did her work with a religious care, nothing less than perfection was bearable with the wonder thing in her heart. She carried her little body as she might a sacred vessel. Now and then fear sped through her that this possession might be taken from her, when a faintly cunning look crept into her eyes. They should not do that. . . .

The old dropsical cook, who commanded mostly from a wide rocking-chair, whose face was fat but white like ivory, flesh that lay in folds about her features, a heavy peasant's countenance, and the gaunt, middle-aged housemaid, treated the kitchen-girl as a child to be admonished hourly for her good. They were not unkind, only educational. They had themselves trodden the narrow way, were both spinsters, and were con-

vinced of original sin in the youthful (in spite of authority) that baptism had not entirely washed away. They perceived a sumptuousness in the child's demeanour the following days, a radiance that only love gives, and an amenability beyond praise. They nosed out the devil in this, caught her dreaming, and looked at one another with significance.

"Man!" they all but said, but did not; however, a pursing up of the lips was more emphasising. The child, unconscious at first, became aware after a while of their suspicious eyes following her. This then was the beginning? She was betraying her secret! How hide it? She pressed her hands on her breast to beat down the waves of emotion that were rising, rising with all the minutes of the day. She would try and be just as she was before! but how? It was a thousand years ago that she was that other person. She assumed a nonchalant demeanour, but she overheard, as she retreated into the scullery among her shining pots and pans, the monosyllable:

"Sly!"

Heavens! were they witches, these old women in the kitchen? How was she to circumvent them? Ah! a sudden anger sped through her. Let them take care! and in this thought the little kitchen-maid conceived, not a vulgar little squabble, but the very firmaments falling and the wrath of the gods.

The old butler perceived nothing of this drama; he

was absorbed in grief for the loss of a loved master and anxiety for his young mistress, whom he was trying to protect from something he could not understand, and for the rest, keeping guard! The secret he had learnt must be hidden, withheld from the women—from those in the kitchen and the ladies upstairs. When he came across the child alone in her outdoor shed, where she did odd cleaning, or in the yard, he smiled kindly at her, for she was a pretty young thing and seemed so happy—a coloured flower here in the midst of sorrow and fear!

How she sang! The voice rose, the old man pricked an ear to it! In its freshness and beauty it seemed to touch an ominous note. "The wild thing!" he found himself ejaculating, and was stirred down to the foundations of his being.

Hester heard, and in a whirlwind swept into the outhouse where the child was.

"You mustn't, you really mustn't."

Phœbe thought she had come to forbid her her love; a look of cunning defiance swam in her half-closed eyes —she waited.

"Do you understand, you mustn't sing like that—it, it isn't—"

"Not sing! . . . No, no, miss, of course not! I beg your pardon, miss—I didn't know." She pressed her hand on her heart as if she were keeping down a song that would out from very gladness at the triviality

of the request, and to Hester's amazement she smiled. She smiled because they forbade her to sing and had not forbidden her to love! Hester went away, feeling odd, insignificant, paltry. After all, it hadn't been much of a matter to stop her, and the whirlwind hadn't been necessary. . . .

. . . . . .

He came to her in the wood at night in a clearing, where the light from the moon streamed down on her, silvering her lilac cotton dress into molten folds about her limbs. She sat above him on a fallen log, her little knees pressed together trembling; her hands, whitened by the moonlight, played nervously with a branch, her eyes were wide open, and the mist of innocent passion clouded them. He caught his breath before her passionate purity, then leapt from the shadows where he stood, leapt like a ferocious beast, crushed her in his destroying arms, and her little face, white and wet with sweetness, smiled up at him as might Mary's at the Annunciation.

PART II

CHAPTER XX

THERE comes to all finely-tempered natures, we think, a passage of time when an overwhelming discouragement assails the soul, when it would seem that the world can only display horror under any critical test. Religion, philosophies, common sense itself are swept aside before the writhing reality of perpetual corruption and stupidity. Even small occurrences appear to combine towards disgust, little meaningless things, absurd, trivial accidents, friends' sudden, inexplicable indifferences, a lover's materialisation from the ineffable to the horrid concrete, or fortune's disfavours, all creep into the deeper, less selfish considerations to cement them with the pertinence of experience. Stuart Maxwell was passing, as his betters before him, through a phase of such oppression. After a long illness, and a longer convalescence on his return to a renewal of the old life, he experienced this weariness. Coming back to his friends he found them talking exactly as if they had left off the day of his breakdown and taken up the thread now. The same obvious wit was in circulation, spoken with the affected manner of those expressing some surprising paradox—empty paradox enough! and the same absurd slang. The heaviest of depressions weighed over his spirits. London, at least the part of it which

stood for his social world, appeared to him after this absence of three months as an absurd, grotesque conglomeration of writhing humanity in silk hats and furbelows, unceasingly *puppeting* for God knows what reason! Interminably one was marshalled to an attitude of a greeting unfelt, to the ceremony of an inarticulate good-bye, this at any rate among the women, in their clinging gauzy garments, changing at every hour of the day.

And with the men! Was it not the same?—The huge monotony of daily life at the clubs? Their affectations differed as the women's frocks, but never the men. The tedium of their likeness, fair or dark, good-looking or grotesquely plain, became an obsession. It would seem that Society moulded her votaries on the one pattern, and how absurdly pleased they appeared, these souls, to be facsimiles of each other! He asked himself, could he not get away? Or would the whole absurdity follow him—dog his footsteps to the country or the continent —up the Nile or in the heights of the frozen mountains? Always the same men and women of fashion, speaking the same futile language; the perpetual laugh of insincerity on their lips and the cunning look in their eyes of beings whose life is a gamble, no different from the horrid little game of coloured pasteboard they affected the world over.

Doubtless there was another view of all this; it remained, however, the only view he could focus at pres-

ent. It was just how the whole thing came to him, as it had come to other men who had slipped away to a fashionable war and had never come back. Was not *it* too, this war, like the rest, ludicrous traffic? Men at one another with bullets without any reason for the business that was reasonable. Young bronzed faces biting the earth!—those well-groomed limbs horribly sprawling!

Why had Campbell gone? Yesterday a handsome debonair, human, cheerfully sick, however, of the "whole show," as he described just the life they all led.

Where, he asked himself suddenly, could he find sanctuary from it all?—from the rich! That was it—the tedious rich.

He was seated in a low chair in his room, sending ring after ring of smoke from his mouth in the tired way of a man inexpressibly bored. He had a clean-shaven face with a humorous mouth, a face suggesting in some way a faun's, his lips curving upwards—something boyish in the man—he looked capable of a *prank!* of secret or wholly innocent fun; yet the countenance generally was thoughtful and the very laughing eyes could display a reflectiveness that went deeper than mere humour. He had a personality that arrested notice in a crowd, and remained a memory. Both men and women found him charming, and never in their summing up of their neighbours' sins and follies did he come under their whip. Criticism would hesitate at his

name and end with a query. He was at any rate a person delightful to look at. A few recognised in him a sensitiveness which could have little to do with the follies and vices of a lax and good-natured society.

"He's an awfully stunning chap, you know, but he's odd," a young blood had complained of him.

"Odd?"

"He will out with facts!"

"You mean that he isn't a liar?"

"Well, I don't know about that—one does have to prevaricate occasionally without being exactly a liar."

"Anyway, he doesn't lie?"

"Funny chap! I don't believe he even does to women!" at which there had arisen Homeric laughter, interrupted only by one sufficiently deep in his cups to be wholly serious.

"All persons tell lies more or less, yet one can safely say that the world may be divided, in spite of David, into those who are liars and those who are not. I don't say that liars are not quite delightful people, but they are in the end inclined to everything else too!"

"What do you mean?"

"Well! they are potential murderers and adulterers and thieves and mean hounds and male prostitutes!"

"Good Lord! half of us?"

"Ah! well! only an inclination in us, you know. The man who won't lie is somehow immune from these little

idiosyncracies!" and again laughter had arisen among the gods.

. . . . . .

Maxwell's eyes wandered round the room and fell casually upon objects it had seemed to him had had value to his spirit, things both of beauty and memory, and some quite priceless: they appeared now dead and absurd. Pieces of bronze that were simply lumps of metal cunningly devised to ensnare the senses! Old books with fine lettering. Good Lord! did it matter, the letters? Or the first editions? Or the vellum bindings? And life was as absurd as all these things—they symbolised it—art and literature! What an immense fraud the rest—neither had anything really to say—beauty, beauty they reiterated over and over again; music shouted it, the poets mouthed it, and the painters desecrated it in immodest efforts to seize colour in its nakedness, and threw it grossly on canvas! Everywhere was attitudinising!—and the end? One was alone and bored.

He got up from his place and moved restlessly up and down the room. He must still be sick! that was the fault! It would surely come back, the sense that life was significant, that art was real, and that women, honest or dishonest, mattered! And yet, as he had seen something sinister and senseless in the bronze Venus on the table, so the thought of the women of his world moved to a shrill note. He had a Faust's vision of

nothing alluring; on the contrary—something absurdly gross, overdressed and "snatching." There was no temptation in his vision, only distaste, and wonder at the absurdity of it all, with a faint feeling that it was sinister because so ridiculous, life descended to its level, and the human soul does not wallow happily. To feel a worm is to first scent the heights, and the pain of crawling becomes as some helpless doom that will go on for all eternity.

When this young man's senses had first wakened to manhood he had stood at bay before the game of life presented to his intelligence. He had found himself suddenly a wary watcher, counting the significance of its rules and holding back with a passionate insistence. He resented the horror of simply sex, and the gross and humorous attitude of his seniors upon the subject. He shrank with a girl's modesty from traffic of the flesh. He revolted against the business he was cynically informed would keep him fit, and save him from the wiles of ensnaring females bent on matrimony or his purse. A straight, clean boy, he found his way to manhood, restraining a passionate body with a fine idealism that even in these decadent days survives in the hearts of the fittest. Of the passage between then and now there was little he was proud of. He had hurt no one—perhaps his own soul the most—a fact not always recognised in the condemnation of his sex. In looking back through the corridors of his young years he perceived

how he had been led, despite all resistance, to the goal the rich young man of his class one way or another inevitably attained. He smiled with a humorous commiseration for the boy. Were the ways and habits of Society then stronger than the individual? And he was bound to admit that they were; and now in his matured manhood, surely when wisdom and control should have been his, he had become entangled with an absurd aristocrat. She read poetry, wrote poetry, wore trailing, shimmering garments, talked wistfully of the poor, wistfully of her life, was beautiful, and had awakened in him an immense sense of chivalry, till he had found that her mind and body were corrupt and her heart not as honest as a barmaid's.

Now as he halted at the end of the room, hesitating in his turn, his eyes rested, with an absent-minded scrutiny, upon a small oil-painting by Romney, hanging near his desk. The face looked out at him, till his consciousness, as well as his sight, became absorbed; the delicate lineaments of the young girl mingled with the passion of satiety that was upon him—upon a sufficiently vigorous nature surely to demand—to insist upon a change, to claim some nourishment for the spirit that should emanate from the vitality of eternal things . . . that were not concerned (he found himself inclined to smile) with "snatching." The word had stuck, remained in his mind, as words do in a fever, becoming a symbol of unaccountable horror, in this

case, stupid horror, the most gruesome of all, for where there is intelligence there must always be some beauty. He saw the little comedy again. The young beautiful aristocrat of whom it was said, she at any rate was gifted and straight as they go. He had overheard the thing in passing—a fleeting sentence that could so powerfully annihilate for all time the dignity of her pretensions—the vision that one had of her as a radiant, cultivated queen, a leader among beautiful women. Her words echoed back to him now, the words she threw at another woman, alluding to some newly-acquired *cavalier servant.* "He looks so attractive, I should like to snatch him from you"—and the business of *snatching* rose before his vision. These creatures in their clinging gold and silver gowns, their hair entwined with wreaths, bacchantes at heart without any of nature's madness, only ready for *snatching* were our women! Ah! to get away from the ignominious stupidity of it all! Even the comic view may grow insupportable.

Gradually the strange eyes of the picture before him ousted the sense of contempt in his heart. The original of the picture was a great-aunt of his own, who had died at child-birth. The sketch had come to him, instead of adorning the hideous walls of the legitimate descendant—The Mallesons!—the name flashed through his mind to repeat itself several times before he quite realised his own idea. Might they not, after all, be worth finding out?—those cousins of his who were the

more direct descendants of this strange-eyed ancestor.

He tried to recall what he could of them, which was little enough. They had been alluded to as eccentric, lived in a remote place away from the world—of course he had met Mrs. Malleson, she had then struck him as a strange personality—out of place a little among the many people. She had vaguely proposed that they might some day see him at Donnington. Why should he not go now? He questioned the picture with a sense of confidence that those secret unfathomable eyes had descendants who might hold some of her mystery.

The notion became a vitalising certainty. He experienced a childish faith in it. He threw off moodiness as if some new and wonderful thing had happened, and sat down at the desk to write, proposing himself.

He took the letter to the post with his own hands, touched by a sense of value in a safe despatching. It had been so long that he had cared at all how his correspondence went, but the new emotion stirred pleasantly within him, and as he met the fresh air on the threshold of the outer door and turned from Pall Mall to go up Waterloo Place, a reaction against the gloom of the afternoon permeated him physically. After all nothing very much mattered! Life was absurd, but the air was balmy and soft, and the letter in his pocket amused him. He glanced up at the sky, at its blue and white, freshly washed by recent rain, meeting the gold of a London's sun above the immense buildings that towered

upwards crossed suddenly by a lacework of wires, throbbing when the light caught them. It was a quiet hour—the traffic had lulled, the world was at lunch, and a spirit of adventure seemed to murmur through familiar sounds which he was to leave voluntarily—to seek assuagement from the hubbub of this city, and, because there was to be this absence, a new friendliness was born in him for its familiar physiognomy which had put on a new look, as it were, for him.

A broad flood of sunshine swept down Waterloo Place. There were very few people about, the black of the men's coats became copper-colour in the light. He went slowly up the hill towards the post-office. His eyes were attracted by a little person, evidently an art student, peering near-sightedly at the signboard of a private art gallery. She was absurdly dressed, as art students so delightfully are; she was small, stooped, was very young and very fair, wore large, round spectacles and a round mushroom hat. Her clothes were of light colours and blew fantastically in the breeze; she carried a handbag that though really small looked fantastically big for her little person; an odd paint-brush protruded at one corner. Stuart caught her glistening eyes, and found them full of profound secrets that they would never tell. He could not help smiling at her, she was such a pure little spirit, devoting her young years to grapple with this immense giant of her profession. She seemed like the petal of a flower wafted into this sunlit,

hot, grey city, to subdue its folk to the beauty of line, of symmetry and true colour, busy in her little brain, not over men, but the vast entrancing question of high tone, clear tints, and, above all, says her queer little eyes, not prettiness! Her sweetness seemed a good omen to his missive and he dropped it into the box, still smiling. He was sure her name must be Camilla.

Two days later the answer came in an old-fashioned handwriting, an old-fashioned paper, faintly scented. The invitation was gracious, nevertheless he could not help feeling that under the politeness there was a covered protest—an almost pathetic appeal to him not, after all, to come. That was how it affected him, awakening, at the same time, an immense curiosity. These dear, good-mannered, sweet people had not the courage to deny him—but why was he not wanted? He glanced up at the rows of cards and letters on the mantelshelf. He had never quite experienced the sensation of not being wanted.

For the moment the affair struck him as humorous, and then somehow nothing of the sort, only strange, and which of us is not won by mystery? They were his cousins! He would go! After all, who could say that his conclusion was justifiable. He read the note over several times, the impression deepened, however, with no further proof, nothing actually stated any disinclination. He was at liberty to accept frankly the hand held out with such delicate diffidence. It was con-

ceivable that he was thought the kind of London man quiet folk shrink from entertaining, and he laughed at the notion. Were not such men as himself just those who could appreciate a difference of social habits? After the license of flare, the restricted, conventional ways of such dear people!

CHAPTER XXI

A DENSE mist covered the whole country, when Maxwell emerged from the station door and looked about him for some kind of conveyance. He had wished not to give his cousins the trouble of meeting him, not being sure if they had a carriage. He secured a fly, the only one apparently in the place, a smeared blot on the grey road, the driver hidden, and its hood wet from the mists, having the effect of crouching, as it were, under the weight of the atmosphere. He settled well into the corner, getting a glimpse of the country from under the sodden covering that formed a framed arch to his view, and from which crystal drops splashed on to the apron.

A steep road winding upwards through ploughed fields faced him. He knew that the moors were beyond and waited for sight of them, with an increased beating of the pulses, as a lover of the sea waits for the first glimpse of a blue horizon. In a very little while they had breasted the hill, and he was awakened from a reflectiveness that had momentarily obsessed him by the consciousness of great open spaces about him sooner than he had expected. The downs! He stooped forward to breathe in their air, to scent those odours, damp and stinging to the senses, of heather and bracken. Wreaths of mist lay in the hollows and over all the pat-

tering, soft rain. Strange sound in the great empty space! Human beings had crept away, hidden in their hovels for shelter since it would seem that every house is a hovel after the great house, roofed only by the skies. Sin was surely begotten within doors, not in the Garden of Eden. The crawling creature doubtless built a hovel, lured Adam and Eve within, and covered by the stagnant air, all the sin and sorrow of the world was hatched.

They drove on into the palpitating heart, as it were, of this grey world; then a line became visible of a distant wood, the tree-tops densely massed like one great canopy forming a dark pattern between heaven and earth, ominous and alluring.

Time passed, the driver appeared to have lost his way, and it did not seem to matter to our traveller; the monotonous noise of the horse's hoofs on the road and the heavy moving fragrance from the damp vegetation lulled Maxwell to a nonchalant acquiescence in any difficulty that should keep him just where he was, driving on into space if needs be. At last the coachman looked around searchingly and ultimately drew up his horse. He was at a loss which way to go.

"Well," the young man said, "I don't know where it is. What do you propose to do?"

"The fog will lift," came the laconic answer.

"The fog will lift," Stuart repeated, and wondered why the man named this wonderful translucent veil

about them—*fog*. He got out. They were on a height and the rain had ceased. A rift was already widening at their feet—far away was a broken piece of blue between the parting of the clouds. He stood still looking, it was so beautiful. Some way on the decline was a white hound racing backwards and forwards, leaping in the air in an ecstasy of movement, like the very spirit of the yielding mist and the grey earth.

"A white hound."

"It's no white hound," answered the driver at his shoulder, "and that's where the house is—yonder wall."

He spoke with decision, and before Maxwell could take in his meaning with regard to the dog, he had mounted the box-seat of the carriage and motioned to him to get in, with a peremptory stolidity that would brook no questioning. He turned the horses and crossing to a rough road drove slowly down.

"No hound," he murmured several times. The thing haunted one after it was spoken.

"Why do you repeat that?" Maxwell called out, "and what do you mean?" but he received no answer, and they arrived immediately before a high blank wall in which was a door, overhung by an ancient lamp. The driver drew up his horse and getting down rang the bell that reverberated through the silence of all the great, unhabited spaces everywhere. The enclosure was actually on the downs; the high wall, and Queen

Anne door with its lamp, there on the very edge of this grey, undulating world. An old road that must some time have been of importance was beautifully covered with gorse and green, showing little spaces here and there of a tan hardness, holding in their hollow centres diminutive pools of water.

Some time passed before the sound of footsteps on the gravel path within reached them, then the door was flung open by a middle-aged man, with the diffident stoop and elaborate manner that is so characteristic of an English servant who is more than a flunkey.

He took the bags and led the way across a garden of box-hedges and shorn green spaces, intersected by tiled paths, to an old-fashioned house with a verandah. He ushered Maxwell through a thickly-carpeted hall into the library, an immense room completely lined with books, having a narrow gallery on three sides for the purpose simply of reaching the higher shelves.

Mrs. Malleson and her two daughters were seated before a tea-table laden with Georgian silver, that gleamed in the declining light.

Her welcome was beautifully reserved. You *would* come, but we are very glad to see you! she intimated through her grave, decorous eyes. Her quiet manner seemed habit rather than shyness of the moment, and he felt at once at ease, though conscious of an atmosphere that differed from any he had experienced. The girls spoke charmingly, with soft, low voices, and

laughed as if to laugh were not merely the necessity among the well-bred on receiving a guest, but just because the natural humour of them had been touched.

"Have you forgiven me for coming?" he said, smiling.

"Ah! but we are so pleased to see you. We had forgotten that we had any relations left at all."

"The extraordinary thing is that we have so few," again he laughed. "I am the most lonely person in the world, and when I hear people choking with dissatisfaction because of a superfluity of brothers and sisters and fathers and things—using dreadful language at the weighty millstone round their necks, etc., I feel inclined to go to Whiteley's and order two dozen of someone's relations to be mine on the hire system. To go without things for no apparent cause must be horrid, but to go without them that somebody of your own blood should have boots that do not let in water must be most delightful!"

"Was it that mood that made you write to us after so long?"

"Oh! I was dreadfully unhappy somehow," he said with the gayest of smiles. "I hunted in all the recesses of my intelligence to find a way out, and a little picture did it."

"A little picture!"

"Some great-aunt, who simply looked at me and

said 'Malleson,' and I had just taken an immense dislike to everything in the room."

"What is she like?"

"Oh!" he answered, scrutinising them all, "she ought to be like one of you—but it doesn't matter," he added, laughing.

And Mrs. Malleson said quaintly, "You think we'll do?"

"So much better than anything I deserve."

Gradually as he sat there he became conscious of a faint anxiety stirring among them, a little manner of waiting for something to happen, when he realised that the door had opened and someone had come in. A controlled nervousness held them. Sensitive to a moral atmosphere, he felt the thing himself, and, with lowered eyes, feigned an absence of attention, being both ignorant of what they feared, and as to whether he was to participate in the cause of this agitation.

Mrs. Malleson leant forward.

"My youngest daughter," she said.

He looked up and bowed to a white figure before him, and continued, at once, his conversation.

What, he asked himself, had happened? Why had they all been so oddly stirred? A slender girl had come silently, yes, he realised that, she came very silently, into the room—why had her mother and sisters revealed so strange and affecting an anxiety? He talked on, wondering if he had been mistaken since the

thing seemed now removed. He looked towards the newcomer with a greater boldness. She was turned away from him, and the sensitive profile under the heavy pale hair, hair so light that it suggested the most delicate of tan rather than gold, awoke in him a desire that she would move, and he found himself halting in his speech. The worldly man of him was ashamed, he endeavoured to get back to the drift of their talk—of his own words.

At last her eyes met his. He had said something that had stirred her, one of those accidental reflections, that come up from one's inner being, when some wholly new circumstance awakens the soul to a spontaneous activity. To meet hitherto unknown and charming people in an intimate and unusual way has a sacramental efficacy. Some mutual passion, unmolested by bodily knowledge, stirs the heart, and if caring should come at that time it can never be greater, never be more wonderful. These two looked at one another. She seemed to peer at him with an expression quite inexplicable, tender, humorous, beautiful. It must have been a long time that they remained so, for he became conscious that a question was being repeated to him from his hostess and that he had failed to answer. He went to her side and sat down. They talked of unimportant things with a simplicity unknown in the hasty and overburdened intercourse of Society elsewhere. There were no catch words, nor the slightest intimation

that it was incumbent to be *au courant* with the latest affectation, the latest scandals. Time here, to Maxwell, seemed a beautiful possession that was not for the nonce in a hurry. Lights were ignored, and his eyes could freely roam over the big room as the shadows lengthened and talk hovered momentarily before dropping to a changed topic. The personalities of his cousins evolved gradually out of the vague unknown to definite contours. He found himself recognising differences, yet always the white face of the youngest would bring his thoughts to a sudden standstill, his pulses would beat a little quicker; then the one they called Hester would interrupt the tension by a movement or a word, and again the quiet talk would flow on.

. . . . . .

Alone in his bedroom that evening, a large apartment with a great fireplace, and an anteroom that recalled a past century in its rigid simplicity, its high, narrow, curtainless window letting in the cold light of the stars so that from the warm interior where he stood it became the receptacle of his thoughts, the place where they might linger unchallenged and vanish into the pale darkness, he stood still and went over in his mind the strange impressions that had held him from the moment he had left the winding road and reached the mysterious moors; yet nothing remained in his thoughts clearly but the girl, the tender-faced, beautiful girl with the strong sinewy young body, who dom-

inated her mother and sisters by some inscrutable magnetism, so that they watched her when she talked, and strangely, terribly enough, became anxious in her presence. Why? She talked so wonderfully, yet she had not said much. Nevertheless it came to him that they were afraid of her. She appeared gentle and tender, a little aloof perhaps, not in a cold way, they it seemed were cold—on the watch, and the reasonableness of her speech had the effect of disconcerting them.

Charming as they were, he recognised that they lacked the girl's wider view. Amazing prejudices were theirs, that to him were delightful, but that he could see were like rocks against which the girl bruised her young spirit. Doubtless, conventions of centuries dominated their souls. How could it be otherwise, living the life of seclusion they certainly led!—but how was it that this flame of a girl was so outside the cage of these conventions? And was it simply this, the trouble? The free wight resisting restraint? That tragic interruption of peace we find everywhere. Surely the solution was here! He reiterated the question to himself and still remained bewildered. No, there was some manifestation, some deeper result that he knew nothing of. It seemed as if her very body, her person, independent of spirit, which we know so easily how to crush, how to ignore, had a force overwhelming and insidious which nothing could affect.

Unexpectedly her voice broke on the silence. It came

from outside and he at once got up and listened, alert, as if the riddle of his questioning might somehow be answered if he took her unawares. He moved to the window, conscious of an agitation that struck him instantly as absurd, yet he failed to control it.

"Go home, Doone," her words rose on the still air, and in the light outside he perceived her figure silhouetted against the dark lines of the moor, her white gown and pale hair looking evanescent with the rest of the night where only the stars' brightness seemed tangible, the universe a reality, the earth a fading quantity in space.

A black retriever stood near her; the creature had none of the servile, impotent manner one is used to find with animals, fawning to resist an order, capering in absurd attitude to endeavour to appease the non-understanding master. On the contrary, straight and still it stood, its head uplifted as one might imagine creatures on friendly terms would appear when meeting in the depths of a primeval forest never penetrated by man. Stuart was held by the scene until the dog turned and pattered away, a black shadow disappearing into the distance. She lifted up her face to the firmament and remained for some moments, her whole body bathed in the light, when a voice calling from the house made her retreat into the shadow.

"I was sending Doone home," she said. The peculiar soft timbre of her voice penetrated the air.

The door closed and bolts were drawn. He turned towards the warmth of his room, to the fire which glowed in the immense grate, to the glimmer of the half-dozen candles—queer orange flames in blue halos, dim protests against the coldness of stars, kindly efforts of brightness. They revealed a strange old room, the visible dignity of a guest chamber not often used, and entirely without new and annoying efforts at luxury and decorative schemes. When he was in bed and the lights extinguished he felt the soft air from without pressing all around him; a faint breeze had risen and came in puffs through the window quickly, quickly filling up space, penetrating his lungs, wooing the body to sleep.

CHAPTER XXII

On awakening he sat up in the wide bed, confused and wondering. Where was he? What was the strange thought that had permeated his mind? Everywhere was a soft sunlight glinting through the drawn curtains, and in places there were the brightest of golden streaks, over all a sweet almost tangible air, and in his heart a tentative agitation. The caressing eyes of the strange girl seemed to cover him now, to subdue him. The very spirit of her seemed with him, and his pulses trembled on the threshold of a new emotion. He began at first to dress quietly and slowly, later he hurried, hurrying as if any moments lost would lose him for ever some delightful happening. Fully dressed, however, he stood still for a moment taking in his surroundings, the aspect of things in the morning light. The big old-fashioned room looked even bigger and queerer than it had on the night before, and acted upon his senses towards adventure. An immense wardrobe, with carven grotesques on its doors, seemed impregnated with cunning intimations, whilst a serpent's head, that protruded from the twisted legs of a table, held unutterable secrets on its pointed tongue. The ivy leaves designed on the thick carpet made him lift his eyes to the window, through which poured a scented air, in-

sinuating, exhilarating, baffling, the air of great open spaces that more than any other stirs the imagination to unusual fancies. He heard again in his thoughts the soft voice of the girl saying *Go home, Doone,* and then the closing of the door. In a few moments he would see her at breakfast, her clear whiteness waiting for him; she seemed to be calling him, and in a sudden agitation he turned to the door and went quickly through.

Outside the room he pulled himself together; the passage, the sight of the man-servant passing in the distance and the mere conventional aspect of things in the inhabited part of the house brought him to a quieter attitude of mind. He moved leisurely towards the stairs and went down happy and inconsequent.

At breakfast she was not present, and strangely enough he was glad. The girls, Hester and Evelyn, were charmingly gay. They remarked at once that their sister was out, that she had had her meal much earlier. He gathered the hour had been put off for him. He begged to be allowed to be early, to be treated as one of themselves. He was their cousin. His hostess looked at him as he said this, and he saw a faint shade of humour pass across her ivory face.

"You are a complete stranger," she said.

"Then you do not remember me?" he answered.

"I remember you perfectly—one does not forget you. You are the type."

"Type?"

"Which occurs at intervals in our family."

"Ah!"

"Quite unlike any of the rest, you know."

"Is not Miss Rene that too?"

The little lady dropped her eyes, when she lifted them there was an unfathomable pain in her look. He was shocked and cast about him for some subject that might immediately change the train of her thoughts. A sense of apprehension crept over him. Was it always to be there then, this attitude of yesterday with regard to his cousin? The three women became suddenly hateful to him, as if they were blaspheming against a young helpless girl. They had cold, inscrutable eyes that were perpetually warning, whilst they withheld their knowledge.

"She is not like anyone in the world," said Evelyn.

"Perhaps her father a little," said Mrs. Malleson with an effort to withdraw from any outward assent to the gravity of her thoughts.

"He was a great scholar?" he said.

"Yes, they say so—he did not trouble, you know."

"Trouble?"

"They wanted him to do things—what is it that scholars do? He did nothing. My youngest daughter has his brain."

She threw a challenging look at him. Courage was

flowing back, as it were, from the ebb. She seemed proud of this resemblance.

"I cannot see that she is like father," said Evelyn, suddenly, speaking her thoughts with downcast eyes. The others looked at her as if what she had said were some unwise inadvertency.

"Why?" he asked.

"We must not lead you astray," she murmured, and smiled with a grave sweetness that was for a moment reassuring. He found himself waiting impatiently for her to continue what she was saying.

"She dislikes scholarship—despises learning and reads with a kind of hate as other people read with love."

There was a silence.

"She does read then?" he asked.

"She *has* tremendously."

"And you?" he said as they moved from the table.

She coloured. "We read quite the ordinary things, are quite conventional, and wish," she added, "just to be that, Cousin Stuart."

"You are not," he said. They were alone. "You are very beautifully different to anyone I have ever met."

"Ah! but we don't like it, and if you would please us, you must say that we are just like our neighbours."

"Could I say it of your sister?" he spoke pleadingly, asking through his manner for her confidence,

but he met only with the latent look of anxiety, and, before he could gather the substance of a question that would not seem impertinent, they were joined by the others. A move was made for the garden; he was shown the place—emerald lawns sequestered between yew hedges of amazing thickness, cut to queer shapes, and little formal, fragrant flower-gardens leading one from the other, roses bound to the wall, which was high, ancient and rich with moss and starry lichen, the weatherbeaten bricks were darkened with soft, purple bloom, crumbling here and there to deep red spaces, and beyond was the wild, silent moor.

"Ah! it is all enchanting," he said. "If you knew how a tired Londoner drinks of life in a place like this!"

"But you have visited so many beautiful places—the great country houses."

"And I detest them—they are abominable! If the houses are ancient and fine, they are made hideous by their loaded interiors and the great, awful green parks with green trees—fat trees, sometimes acres and acres, and iron railings and dank, still lakes,—and the preserves, where they do their slaughter! Never a peasant crossing the horizon, hardly ever the view of golden corn! And the people you meet on the highways! Oh! think of it! They are always servants, or the *snatchers* and their males."

"Snatchers!"

"They hang their pictures over their doors, one on top of another like a ladder."

"What are snatchers?" said Evelyn; a faint smile, that suggested so much the suppression of a joyous nature, flitted across her face.

"I won't tell you," he said, laughing. "You would never, never understand. Aristocrats are born and bred our inferiors."

"When," said Mrs. Malleson, "did you cease to be of the aristocrats?" She, too, smiled, and he was glad to see a spirit of happiness with them.

"Oh! I protest. Never, never have I been of them. They are a peculiar and very determined species. They are the flourishes of humanity, and I detest flourishes."

"You must not deprive us of gentility," murmured Hester; "we should be lost."

"A cobbler may become a gentleman," he said, "never can he become an aristocrat. You can only be a flourish, you cannot achieve it—it is an expressive nothing."

He leant forward. "Tell me, have you any neighbours, Aunt Gertrude?"

"A very few."

"And are they nice? It's so difficult to keep the commandment if they are not. We never love our neighbours in London, we get out of it by not knowing them. You can't love what you don't know!"

"Well, everyone knows everyone here; but there are feuds."

"How perfectly delightful!"

"Have you no feuds in London?"

"Not many; people dislike each other so much that if it came to feuds no one would have any friends."

"Do you mean people dislike their friends?"

"Yes, I had never thought of it—but that is what it comes to; the more intimate people are, the more contemptuous of each other they become, and their only social satisfaction is rushing on to know new people that they may wallow in new contempts. It's really quite a dangerous thing to express a liking for anyone. You are either suspected of not knowing them, of wanting something from them, or of nursing an illicit passion."

A faint flush spread over the girls' faces, then Hester said, with tremendous audacity:

"Then it isn't true that someone is really always in love with someone else they shouldn't be?"

"Oh! all the time, Miss Hester, all the time!"

"What happens then, if it's so all the time?"

"It's the same thing you see as friendship, they get tired and have to begin again."

"And you have been many times in love, Cousin Stuart," she went on with a soft malice.

"The only time one's ever in love is when one is in love, what has happened before wasn't the time."

Gradually through all this light talk in the heavily-scented garden he found himself growing anxious for the appearance of the girl who had been, after all, so much in their thoughts. *Her* long absence became desolating. He wanted to say "But why isn't she here? Why is she not with us?" and the absurd idea that perhaps she was shut up troubled his mind. He ceased to want to speak. They talked on and he did not listen, he was simply waiting. He had been glad at first that she was not there, and now her absence became a torment—quiet enough, of course. He found himself mocking the thing, questioning the absurd advent of such an emotion as a queer madness absorbed from the stinging air of the moor during that wet drive yesterday. How golden the world was to-day after the mists. His thoughts reverted to the white hound he had seen racing in the distance. Had the spirit of its restlessness come to him?

They were sitting on an ancient stone seat at the end of a long green path, with a view on their right through an arch cut in the dense yew hedge of a rose garden, and now at the end of the path appeared the tall figure of a man. The black retriever he had seen from his window on the night before walked a few yards in front of him.

"Ah! here is Mark Grey," said Mrs. Malleson, simply. Hester, who had been gathering flowers, moved towards him, and Stuart's eyes, accidentally falling on

Evelyn, noticed that she coloured; seeing that she had caught his attention she answered what might have been the appearance of a query in his look.

"He is a painter."

"That will be interesting. I have never met a painter, only academicians."

"Oh! he is interesting, but he can't say anything so . . ."

"So?"

"Stimulating. You will be very good for us. . . . We have always thought of aristocrats and academicians as persons of great importance."

"There are exceptions among the latter, you know," he answered, at which she laughed quite joyously.

"Isn't he rather beautiful?"

"We hadn't thought of that either. He is just one of us."

Stuart still smiled at her. "Wages instead of notice, you know,—I'll pay them!"

"It might be good if one could do that," she said, quite gravely.

The young man threw back his head and laughed. "Is that the way you wish to get rid of your friends Miss Evelyn, when you are tired?"

"I am not tired. I will never be tired, only—"

"Only?"

"Oh! I don't know what I mean—I think I would like to pay myself off—discharge myself."

"And get a new one."

"That's it. . . . Begin again." The smile was back in her face.

"Is he another cousin?"

"No—you are our only one."

"Then, why one of yourselves, Evelyn?"

"Well, you see, you didn't come, did you?"

"But now I am here you'll have to discharge him!"

She laughed. "Let's do it at once," she said, and then, as she looked at him, a grave expression swept away her dimples, the corners of her mouth drooped, her lips parted and formed the hollow of an unspoken question. In a minute he was in their midst. Stuart was at once aware of the strong personality of the man. He was tall and thin and very beautiful and quite unself-conscious. His near-sighted eyes were the grey that at moments became blue like the horizons he was always scanning. He had a shy manner which was winning both to men and women, with odd moments of fierce arrogance, aroused by some queer, unnoticeable incident that to ordinary persons would have no significance; this characteristic Stuart observed only later; on their first meeting he found himself simply watching the man because of an attraction it was difficult to define.

He thought at once of Rene in relation to him rather than Evelyn, who had betrayed, by her whole physiognomy, a delicate agitation in his presence. They saun-

tered back towards the house. Stuart found it difficult after a first greeting to say anything; the man dropped into a silence that the others seemed to accept without embarrassment. He learnt later to accept this mood of the painter with the rest of them. His silence was not quite like the silence of other people. There was an atmosphere of spiritual life about him which quickened anyone in his company to a living mood, as it were; conversation only ceased because somehow a deeper communion with all things seemed to stir within one's subconsciousness. One might tramp miles across country with this man in silence and only feel at the end that time had been pregnant with everything, except just—words.

As they neared the house now Stuart became aware that Rene was standing immediately outside the door. This sudden vision of her out in the sunlight, for the light appeared to bathe her person in an almost tangible substance, her fairness seeming to mingle with it and her supple body pressing against the atmosphere like the prow of a ship against soft waves, strung every nerve in his body to tension, he dropped his eyes and in lifting them met the look of Mark Grey fixed upon himself; the look disconcerted him, it was ironical and a little fierce, the queer combination of caring and not caring. He asked himself if the man were her lover, and remembering Evelyn anger swept through him; he moved swiftly forward, throwing a momentary glance

back at the painter; but the latter's face had lost all expression except that of a mentally tired person, his lids were dropped, and he stood still, hesitating, it would seem, as to quite what he meant to do. His dog, however, leaped to the side of the girl. She put her slender fingers through its fur, whilst she looked at Stuart without speaking. The warm fragrance from the flowers of the heavily-laden rose trees sailed upon the air—the voices of the others seemed far away. Her eyes held him physically, strange golden lights that glimmered down into the deeps of his being. He felt a little child in her grasp, and passion beat upon a string that united them, a melody of all the senses, a movement of the spheres pressing two souls in its infinite harmony.

"Do you like our garden, Cousin Stuart?" the sound of her voice fell like the noise of rose petals shaken to the ground. He could not answer. He did not want to speak. Then a flame shot through his person and he said:

"I wanted to see you."

Slowly the colour rose into her face and then ebbed.

"You must never say to me what you do not mean," she said.

The other had entered the house. A numbness came over him and a cloud before his eyes. Hester was gathering flowers a little way off, then suddenly, abruptly, the painter came between them.

CHAPTER XXIII

"We have arranged a picnic, Cousin Stuart."

Evelyn bent over a basket with the old servant, James, who endeavoured, with great seriousness, to get bulging parcels into impossible spaces.

"For to-day?"

"This afternoon.

Stuart received the information with a smile. The notion of a feast partaken far away on a hillside, or in a wood or among sheltering rocks by a seashore, never loses its promise to the imaginative of subtle pleasure; whatever failure experience may have brought, pulses beat quicker at the suggestion, and it would seem that the old God Pan peers down the passage of the ages and survives again in the hearts of his lovers.

"How delightful of you," he said. "I haven't been to a picnic since I was a child. Of course one eats on the river, you know, and out shooting, spreads of kinds in the open, but they aren't second-cousins-once-removed to real picnics *per se*."

Evelyn sat back on her heels and looked up at the young man with a reflectiveness that was quite impersonal.

"Are we second-cousins-once-removed?" she asked.

"I believe that we are only eighth cousins or something of that kind."

"You don't seem to want to own us very closely."

"I want you all, every one of you, for my very own," he said.

She laughed beautifully.

"And James?" she retorted with sudden audacity, looking at the frail old man with humour in her eyes.

"Of course."

"James is dreadfully conceited."

The old servant continued his packing, ignoring the allusion to himself; his refined and beautiful face was imperturbable. Maxwell was fascinated by the movements of his dexterous old fingers and the grave importance of his adjustments. The difficulty of a successful packing for a picnic is one of its fascinations; the delight of achieving a really safe place for the salt is like conquering some insurmountable obstacle of nature against civilisation. That, perhaps, is the wonder of this business of a planned feast out of doors, a primitive instinct to overcome difficulties, to make beautiful use of trivial things, to force nature to one's service—to show how all-sufficient, after all, she can make herself, a hollow leaf for a cup and a smooth rock for a table.

"Will there," he said, "be a bonfire?"

Even James now took heed. An air of immense importance and delight came over him. Evelyn rocked

with a kind of ecstasy, and Stuart felt his pulses beat with excitement.

"There will be a bonfire!"

He at once looked towards the door.

"Oh! but it is really going to be fine," he said, becoming suddenly anxious, as all true picnickers become prior to a start. He walked to the step and looked up into the unfathomable blue, where sailed diminutive white clouds, little assertions of the presence of their fleecy kind somewhere in the vast expanse.

James followed, and with a more business-like exactitude sought the horizon—north, west, east and south—then lifted his old head and scanned hurriedly the centre blue.

"It will be quite fine, sir," he said with authority, and returned to his packing.

Stuart strolled out into the garden between the box hedges. He looked down at the bright-coloured flowers that nestled closely together in great profusion, as if aware of the luxury of this corner of the earth, so beautifully sheltered from dangers of devastating winds, or tramping hoofs of beasts, or nibbling menacities of furred rodents. Outside the high wall that sheltered them were dangers unspeakable to the velvet and silk of their petals; there were coarse creatures of inelegant aspect who could swallow up the nourishment of the soil in a horrid voracity, vulgar plants unpowdered or painted, with thick waists; one could catch a

glimpse of them through the opening door. There was a preposterous thistle that doubtless felt itself distinguished by its proximity to court! It was apparently in love with a ridiculous little person that flowered under its protection, a blue-hatted minx!

Stuart looked up from them to the fleecy clouds and thought, Oh! it is fine, it is a wonderful day for a picnic! What dear people they were, these cousins of his! He went down a narrow path between lilies and roses; their heavy scent saturated the air, their pink and white were clear interruptions on the delicate green, exquisite shapes patterning the way. He came to the gate, a little wooden crazy barrier, wired across doubtless to keep out the rabbits and squirrels, and the very thought of them to the townsman was delightful: white-tailed absurdities that scurried away from you into magic holes or sat up on their haunches, aware, were they? of the absence of a gun. The gate opened to an orchard of apple trees, the crookedest apple trees surely in the world, things that might have stepped out of a Chinese masterpiece, stunted into such queer shape by the great winds that swept over the encircling plains.

And then he came upon Phœbe.

She was gathering apples in her coarse apron. He stood still and watched her unseen, the rough little figure with red hands and neatly-braided head! He could not see her face. The sunlight caught her in patches through the trellises of the trees. When she

rose at last and came towards him he found himself thinking of a hidden pool and of wild violets. He wondered what she was named, when a harsh voice somewhere called "Phœbe!" and he laughed. Of course, Phœbe!—what other could it have been? He was struck by an indefinable modesty in her demeanour that was not virginal, thinking only vaguely about her, and named her in his thoughts "little mother of the orchard"—so young too! Was she seventeen? He strolled back again, conscious that he had been looking for Rene and had not found her.

Mrs. Malleson, Hester, Evelyn and Mark Grey were standing about the door in the high wall; they were laughing and moving here and there in some apparent business. Through the arch of the gateway was visible James, seated on the very shaggiest of donkeys. He wore a tall hat. It had once been white, it was a big hat, and the beautiful face of the old man came from under it with a perfect dignity. He wore white socks, and his trousers, slightly hitched up, revealed them, yet he was queerly congruous, beautifully in the picture with the great white clouds rolling behind him on the blue. The painter was securing the basket about the beast by means of a strap.

"I want to ride a donkey," said Stuart, meditatively, at which they all laughed.

Rene appeared.

"What are you laughing at?" she said.

"Stuart says he wants to ride a donkey."

"Oh!" she answered quickly, "I want to ride a tiger!" And they all laughed again absurdly, delightfully, as if they were a little intoxicated with the balmy air. There came a vision to them of everyone riding off on the backs of queer animals, then Stuart became aware of a sudden shadow across the path, an interruption, and the young girl he had seen in the orchard was in their midst with a look of concern in her eyes.

"Oh! I am too late," she cried, for James had disappeared on his steed. "The apples," she said. Everyone stopped laughing abruptly and looked at her. Her dismay seemed contagious.

"What is it?" asked Mrs. Malleson, sympathetically.

"The apples!"

Then Rene laughed.

"It's all right, Phœbe. Don't be so unhappy. I will take the apples," and in a moment they were all gay again, and Phœbe had disappeared. They turned out at last, closing the door in the wall with a bang, and the sense of adventure and happiness was with them.

Stuart found himself by the side of Evelyn; Rene was ahead with Mark Grey, they were striding along leading the way and talking. Stuart could not quite get from his mind the interruption of the little servant, the menial's utter dismay at being a few minutes late. How significant such a trivial mishap must be to her

kind! The concerned little face amidst their happiness remained a vision that recurred unwantedly.

It proved a wonderful place they had selected for their halt. The moor dipped precipitously, a sheer piece of rock, twenty feet into a still pool, a diminutive lake, shadowy and deep; the road wound down to it to the softest and greenest turf with patches of golden sand, and at this lower level the downs undulated on towards the distant woods. Where they sat near the lake the sheer rock above them rising from the water cut a black line across the skies, and some of the others came to the edge and looked down and waved to them below.

They wandered about and gathered sticks, tethered the donkey, and helped James with the basket. The fuel for the fire was gathered in armfuls, prickly gorse, and in a very little while tongues of flame licked upwards and smoke curled in circles through the clear atmosphere.

When things were ready they discovered unexpected surprises.

Caviare sandwiches, little lemon cakes that melted in the mouth, and covered things with hidden seductions of cream and strawberry. They ate with shining eyes, and crumbs were permitted to fall on coat and dress with happy inconsequence. They lay full length on the grass and experienced the wonderful dizziness of looking straight up into the face of the great heavens, when

one becomes conscious of the earth's movement and, queerly, of the possibility of falling off into a lapping, kindly ether.

The men smoked, and Grey threw pebbles into the silent pool, making circles they all watched, which broke up the reflections to blurred grotesques.

James, who had retired some distance off, was hob-nobbing with a shepherd, and suddenly on the drowsy quietness of the late afternoon came the sound of a flute, high, calling.

Rene suddenly began to dance, her limbs moved in a rhythmic sway, her body curved, her hair became loosened, straw-coloured meshes that covered her shoulders, the declining light enveloped her in a golden mist. The painter's nostrils dilated as he watched. Stuart held his breath, his pulses beat, he felt himself drawn towards her in a warm, sweet union, a subtle faintness went to his head. She wove a spell with the rhythm of her movements, she entangled all things in the meshes of her hair—the great heavens and the sinking sun and grey downs and the still lake, and the hearts and bodies and souls of the men who watched her—but in the eyes of her mother Stuart suddenly surprised fear; they were wells of pain.

CHAPTER XXIV

During the following days he was entertained with a certain formality by his hostess and Hester. He found it difficult to break through a reserve that appeared to be the outcome of some fear. He succeeded, however, in a measure. Their cousinship made intimacy a natural thing among them, and the fact that there were no men in the house precluded that formality of separation of the sexes that so often makes a man's visit simply the passing of a stranger. Women are not naturally formal. Evelyn gave him a glimpse under her gravity of a humorous goodwill, though she suffered the same anxiety at moments observable in the others. She threw it off better, however, and seemed at times desirous to reassure him. She was always present when Rene was in the room, sitting silently over some piece of embroidery, as that wonderful girl talked in a passionate way, or remained quiet with her mysterious eyes on his, listening to God knows! what nothings he actually poured forth. Once in the twilight she came and sat near him on the ground, her feet tucked under her and the beautiful head resting just against his knees. Evelyn had moved uneasily, and her lips had parted as if she would speak, but she did not, and they remained, as they often did, together in

comparative silence, a word now and then falling from one or the other, breaking softly on the air.

Still, he had failed ever to be alone with her. It was obviously not accidental, the unobtrusive watching; but he realised that it must lessen with time, that only patience on his part would bring his relations with them to a more trusting intimacy. Grey seemed to have gained that. "He is a privileged person," he said to Evelyn with a poor enough effort at chaff. He had noticed him come in with Rene from a walk.

"You took so long to come to us," she answered lightly. "After all, you are a great success. We can't resist you, though we try, you know."

"Why do you try?"

"We are not used to your gaiety."

"Gaiety!" he protested.

"And your point of view—your topsy-turvy philosophy concerning all things—you shock us on most occasions; but in the secret of our hearts it is all like a fresh breeze. Mother is bewildered, though I find her sometimes smiling to herself. And what is strangest of all, you are like Rene . . . that helps us," she added quite gravely. "We have never understood her."

"I do not think you understand her," he answered with some seriousness.

"We are prejudiced," she threw out.

"Evelyn, tell me—don't look at me like that—tell me."

"Hush!" she said, "someone is coming. You will understand in time."

"Is there something I have to know?"

She put her hand to her forehead with a tired action.

"Know!" she echoed. "Can't you see that we don't know ourselves? We don't want to. One must keep sane. Is not this the difficulty in life? Is not that, after all, the meaning of the restricting conventionalities you laugh at? The wearing treadmill of daily little business that we turn our physical body to, that we may keep from touching the forbidden fruit, which surely in this life results in madness."

"Not in real life, Evelyn?" he put in. "Does not your sister make one grasp the difference? She will have nothing of the treadmill."

"And how she suffers!" came the answer.

"No, no," he persisted, "she strikes me as the most serene being I have ever met when she is herself."

"Ah!"

"Well, and when she is not, her suffering seems to be of a higher nature than . . ."

"The treadmill? Yes, the treadmill annihilates suffering—it only tires."

He turned impatiently away.

"We are talking in vain symbols of something very serious. Is it fair to me to say so little?"

"Patience," she said humbly. "There are some things one cannot say."

His eyes turned to the window, through the square frame of which glistened the wonderful view, first of the rose-laden gardens and dark myrtle hedges, then a wooded hollow, cradling a still lake, and beyond the blue undulating plains receding to the infinite space of arching skies.

"Oh! Do you see there," he exclaimed, "far down the path across the edge of the moor?"

"What?"

"That hound—that strange, white hound."

Her naturally pale face turned grey as death and the shadows deepened under her eyes.

"No, no," she cried, "I don't want to see . . . come away!"

"Evelyn, what is the matter?"

"There is no hound," she said deliberately, and moved towards the door, where for a moment she hesitated, and then went out.

He stood confused. Why had she said there was no hound? That was precisely what the peasant coachman had averred. Was it then only a delusion of his own? Impossible! Twice he had seen the thing, or some apparition! More likely he decided it was a mad, roving creature, a real hound that the peasants had gone in fear of, and at last had conceived to be a phantom—some superstitious dread had surely grown up.

Ah! these dear people of the moors, they were amazing! Rene, at any rate, would tell him about the thing.

She was fearless always in her speech, fearless in the way she had the power to look down into the depths of hidden thoughts, or uncover a skulking idea, reveal it cold and shivering before truth, or radiant and warm, according to its nature. What was the matter here? What was all this doubt and suspicion, this intolerable atmosphere of terror round her, who was so frank, so gifted, so tender, so sane?

He lifted his eyes at the sound of a closing door and met those of Grey. He had come into the room silently. Stuart threw him a good-morning.

"Did you," he said, "come across from over there?" He indicated the direction in which he had seen the hound.

"No, why?" he asked, with the direct manner peculiar only to painters.

The other watched his face intently.

"I saw a very beautiful hound."

His grey eyes did not move from his.

"Are you sure?"

"You, too!" he said.

"I only say that," he went on quietly, "because these mists of the plains play strange tricks with the appearance of things."

"Have a cigarette?"

"Thanks."

"I see your paint-box there. Are you doing anything interesting?"

"I have started Evelyn."

He showed him the canvas.

It was beautiful. "How can you do it?" he said; "you have created the very breeze, the sunlight, and her tremulous soul looks out of her eyes. You only want my imaginary white hound in the distance to complete the mystery of your work."

Grey turned abruptly aside.

"For God's sake, don't say that before the others."

An odd excitement took hold of Stuart at his words, he moved to the fireplace and leant with his back against the mantelshelf.

"Then you will tell me about it?"

"Tell you!" he echoed, and was silent.

He prowled restlessly about the room; at last he halted, looked up first at his companion, and then out of the window to the distance.

The blue rings of smoke came out of his mouth, obscuring his face at moments; the sunlight made a halo about his sinewy person, and gradually Stuart lost the point they were on in the new thought that this handsome, alluring man had an individual power above the ordinary expressed in every line of his face. It came to him that he was a friend of Rene's; worthy enough, he had to admit, as he turned his eyes quickly to the canvas. Grey was a great painter; our young man became oppressed by the sense of the justice of the thing. What right had he, an absurdity from his hot-

bed of social life, to dream he had any place near Rene? This man was fine, significant, had accomplished something—was . . . The painter's low voice broke at last upon his meditation.

"I have," he said, "perhaps made too much of it, but I am sure you will feel with me that of all people in the world your cousins and Mrs. Malleson make it, by their kindness, incumbent on us not to do—to distress them unnecessarily—even in this thing that may seem to you quite childish."

Stuart smiled and answered nothing.

To break through the reticence of this man, who was a comparative stranger to him, was impossible. He most nimbly double-locked the doors, as it were, of the subject before one's eyes, and in a perfectly amiable way, even with a wistful apology discernible in his manner.

"I am, then, free outside the question of the family?"

"No, if you care for them," he returned simply.

Care! What an inadequate and absurd word it sounded. *He* cared doubtless, but did not that canvas over which he was leaning now, dexterous achievement of colour and light, mean more to him than any human form? Could the pain of passion ever interrupt the absorption of that fine intelligence in just the arrangements of greys and blues, or was genius only fullest under the great comradeship? He tried to think of

Rene as the warning inspiration to such a man, in the way women had been in the life of Goethe and his kind, and he shelved the idea as preposterous. She simply was what they were all trying to express, these painters and poets! Mark Grey could not, dare not love her! Such men can never know anything of love; only promiscuous affections, or effeminate dallyings may be theirs—the body's excess, sensuous satisfaction—but the first matter to them is Art. And they, so impotent in spiritual passions, revel in their shortcomings, strut with rising feathers in superior satisfaction at having eternal things with which to mix their finite paint, or point their scratching quills, whilst they are in truth servants of the lovers, who pass them on the road of life in the light of a sun that dazzles their tired eyes.

Evelyn returned to the room, she smiled at the painter with the welcome of one expected. She was to sit to him out of doors. They hung over the picture. He touched the canvas with the tip of his third finger and she did the same only just at the edge.

"It's dry," they said with extraordinary enthusiasm. She coloured with pleasure and he looked at her, as a schoolboy might look at the news of some amazingly delightful happening.

And Maxwell thought—it is you he will use, your body and your soul, to get those prismatic scintillations, and your poor heart will experience the ecstatic joy of

discovering the canvas is dry. There will be no other joy for you.

They went out, hobnobbing, into the garden, and alone in the shadowy room, with its windows painted by the blue of sky and hills and the gold of light, he thought of Rene. She seemed present, more present than when she was actually with him, as if their spirits were free from the strange barrier of the body, yet . . . he went to look for her.

CHAPTER XXV

STUART had remained reading in his room, the spacious room with its massive furniture of a generation, when bedrooms were not the horrid, stuffy kennels they have become, but places for rest or communion in private with oneself or fellow-creatures, an apartment possible to receive in, or in which to take a solitary meal if disinclined for company. Big table, big chairs, books, space. A room always pleasant to remain in, and the only kind of room, Stuart found himself humorously cogitating, to die in.

A noise distracted his attention. Footsteps hurried past his door, and a murmuring below, as if someone was in distress, reached him. He got up at once, but was undecided what to do. He opened his door and stood for a moment within. Perhaps they would rather he did not interfere. He remained still to listen. Someone was crying. It is an odd, unnerving sound, a woman's crying in the silence of the night. He looked at his watch—it was one o'clock. He had better go down. He hesitated, then went from the room and along the dark passage. Again, on the staircase, he paused, looked back over his shoulder towards the darkness and his room, that suggested a haven of the known from some storm it was not meant he should wit-

ness. There were glimmering lights below. He went down.

Standing in the centre of the hall was Rene. Her arm was torn and bleeding, her eyes were looking straight before her as if unseeing. James was on his knees, in hastily put on garments, his braces hanging loose, and his sleek white hair ruffled. His face was lined with pain. He was bathing the lacerated arm. Mrs. Malleson was crying, her head in her hands. Evelyn, in a loose gown, held a candle in one hand and pressed the other on her mother's shoulder with some effort, doubtless, to arrest her grief. Rene was fully dressed.

The scene was strangely horrible. There was nothing in a girl having her wound dressed by the old servant, or even the display of some anxiety over such a mishap by her mother and sister; yet Stuart experienced instantly the sense of tragedy that is beyond any outward evidence. These women were suffering from terror, and Rene was unconscious of it, and in her unconsciousness was an uncanny, pitiable aloofness that seemed to separate her from them all. It was difficult to speak.

"Can I do nothing?" his words interrupted the moaning of the elder woman. Her self-control was instantaneous. She rose from her seat, her red eyes, like caverns of sorrow, only betrayed her.

"Rene has had an accident," she said simply. "I am so sorry you have been disturbed."

"Oh! it doesn't matter—can't I do anything? Shall I go for a doctor?"

"No—it isn't serious."

"How did it happen?" he asked anxiously. They all for one moment looked at him, then James began to speak hurriedly, with the soft accent of the country which blurred over the words. It was difficult to catch his explanation, for he hesitated between phrases as he began to bind the arm. The two women simply listened. Stuart, however, gathered that she had fallen on some sharp rock in the darkness.

Then Mrs. Malleson said abruptly:

"She fainted."

The remark came out perfectly casually, almost with a tone of satisfaction.

A sudden anger came over the young man—why did they let her stand whilst they did their work? Obviously she was ill.

"Wouldn't it be better if Miss Rene lay down whilst you do that?"

At the sound of her name the girl looked at him.

"Oh! Cousin Stuart, you look so angry! . . . they are all angry, so angry!"

Evelyn said, "No, no, Rene, it's all right, we are not angry."

A sigh of relief escaped Mrs. Malleson as the girl spoke. It came over Stuart that she had not spoken before, and that they had been waiting for her to speak.

A sense of relief came to them; the old man, having finished his task, got up. The girl suddenly swayed and Stuart leapt forward and caught her in time.

"I feel rather weak," she murmured.

"I should think so—you shouldn't have stood. . . . I am going to carry you to your room."

No one demurred, yet they hardly assented, waiting as if still something might happen, the tentative sway of their persons towards him, prepared to arrest his movements if it were necessary. He held her tight in his arms. The dear, warm body! he felt her heart beating against his. They were mad, these people!—what was the matter with them all, for their pale faces were watching her aghast? Suddenly a smile crossed her lips, an intimate, sweet, wilful smile; she pressed her cheek against his coat.

"Do take me away, they do bother so!"

"It's all right," he said, and strode up the stairs, his anger giving him more than ordinary strength. She was not heavy. At her door they encountered Hester in her nightdress and her braids of dark hair falling on either side of her shoulders.

"She's like Lady Macbeth," said Rene with a smile, "only I have the 'out damned spot.'"

Who could help laughing?—Yet as he glanced down at the wound and saw the blood oozing through the bandage, the laugh died in his throat. He held her closer. He hated to relinquish her to her people. He

blamed them, without any adequate reason. The girl had fallen down and hurt herself; but in Heaven's name, why had she been out, when apparently everyone else had long retired? He laid her tenderly upon the narrow white bed and she looked up at him still with mischief in her eyes. A faint colour was returning to her cheeks.

"Are you in pain?" he asked.

"No, sir," she said, with a dimpled demureness.

Their eyes rested upon one another.

"Child," he said on the impulse, "don't go out at night."

"I'll take you next time," she answered with an absurd gravity that stirred the manhood in him almost to pain. He turned abruptly from her and met the eyes of Hester.

"I suppose she oughtn't to be left," he said coldly.

"I will come in again," said Hester; "she will sleep now."

"How do you know?"

"Oh! she always does."

"Does this happen often then?"

She coloured. The face of James appeared at the door and instinctively Stuart followed him out. The old man, however, left him at his bedroom, apparently to avoid any questions, and Stuart found himself alone in his room again as if he had awakened from some queer dream. He turned things over in his mind with little result. The facts were simple enough, if deplora-

ble, but behind there was some spiritual drama, which was not simple, and of which he was utterly ignorant.

The pale cameo face of the man-servant—the anxiety expressed in every line of his physiognomy, balanced by a reticence of demeanour, that made any approach to confidence almost an impossibility, remained in his thoughts. James was in it! Stuart determined that he would appeal to the old man on the grounds of his cousinship to the family (and the fact that he was the only man in the house) to throw some light on all the pain and trouble he had witnessed.

The explanations at breakfast next day were reassuring enough. Rene had stayed out late, Mrs. Malleson had got over-anxious—the child had had an accident, hence her late return. She was weak this morning from loss of blood. Dr. Martin had been, and all was well. All was well, that was the emphasis. That was what seemed their real anxiety, no longer any question of Rene or her habit of taking night rambles, but the necessity of their guest being quite reassured that nothing inexplicable had occurred.

After a very brave show at table he found himself, however, alone. They were not discoverable, as usually here and there, doing those delightful, incidental things that young women do in the summer in the country. Once only Evelyn flitted past him, and though she smiled at him a shadow was across her face and a movement of anxiety in her step.

He pondered on the thought of unearthing James. James, after all, was a domestic, doubtless like other domestics, open to a tip and a little friendly intercourse. But how unearth him? He was a factotum who went through strange metamorphoses, and though the man had no shame at being seen at "boots," he expected as "boots" not to be spoken to,—"boots" was an inferior menial to whom monosyllables were sufficient address. As gardener he was, however, open to converse, but to-day apparently he was not to be found under this rôle, only the old fellow he assisted who was a good deal past his days of hard work.

Stuart did at last catch sight of him through a half-open door at the end of a passage, leading from the central hall. He guessed it was the pantry, and made his way there with the excuse of finding matches to refill his silver box. The man was wearing a green baize apron and was cleaning silver. In the shadowy room his white, clear-cut face was beautifully framed, and he did his work, softly murmuring "Sir" at intervals with a solemn politeness, as if too hard rubbing would be indecorous in the presence of his visitor. Stuart asked for a match and threw a sovereign among the things on the table with a smile.

The old man ceremoniously produced matches. Desultory talk followed, but Stuart failed to get near his point. What, after all, was it he had to ask? There was nothing that had not been explained—that he could

definitely formulate, yet the old man's eyes looked into his at moments, begging, as it were, to be let off . . . and why? Then suddenly an odd thing happened. Stuart saw it all perfectly plainly; the butler managed to push his silver so that the piece of money rolled off the table on to the floor with the visitor's empty silver match-box, which he had for the moment put on the table to refill. James picked the two up and returned both the sovereign and the box to their owner in the gravest of manners, and Stuart found himself pocketing his tip with a thanks that somehow necessitated his retreat. What a damned reticent old fellow he was, and how dexterously he had refused to be bribed!

. . . . . .

A peculiar sense of isolation came over him as he wandered aimlessly through the scented gardens later in the day. He felt that he ought to leave Donnington, or be admitted into a closer confidence with the family —yet what right had he to persist in claiming from them what they would not admit there existed to give? The whole thing was so entangled. Rene, it seemed to him, was being hurt by some treatment of his cousins that they doubtless were convinced was for her good. She was a prisoner to a moral attitude, as it were. There was always an atmosphere of disapproval and a waiting fear behind it, the former seeming to be only modified by the presence of the latter. In Hester especially was this spirit of watchfulness manifest, this

interference with the girl's mind. It came to him that they would do her irrevocable harm, and at the thought he hesitated. Weaker minds than her own were dominating her—or was that the explanation? Was this girl, who seemed so reasonable to him—so full of the mental comradeship usually only found between men, at times not herself?—not responsible, and was this their fear? His blood coursed quicker in his veins, and he looked over his shoulder towards the house as if he were afraid of being caught pondering on such a thought. A fierce compassion swept through him—supposing if in some way it were true, then still more was she his affair. A great tenderness moved his pulses. The possibility of such a calamity awoke in him the consciousness that to care as he cared for Rene was to care above all human consideration.

CHAPTER XXVI

He found her alone in the library. He had entered the narrow gallery that ran two sides of the room. She was seated on the ground, leaning where the railing and wall met, her eyes resting on the great window opposite. No one was below. The silence of a library is more complete than that of any other place, and the presence of those countless volumes, armouring the walls against sound, loads the atmosphere, it would seem, with their unspoken contents, so that noise is always there an interruption, even if one is only loitering in idleness.

The heavy carpet on the floor made his entry quite inaudible, yet she at once turned her face to him, and parting her lips in a movement of greeting her caressing eyes closed for an instant in consent to his approach. Her arm was in a sling. His pulses moved quicker and emotion almost intolerable possessed him. He leant against the balustrade at her side and looked down into the room below. He dared not look at her.

"How is your arm?"

"Oh! it's all right."

"It must have hurt you."

"Not very much," she hesitated; "I think that I was unconscious when it happened."

"Did you fall?"

"Fall?"

"You fell, didn't you?"

"It just tripped me up, you know."

"What tripped you up?"

"The trap!"

"Good God! and your arm got caught?"

"Oh! it was nothing."

"But what sort of trap was it?"

"Don't ask me, because I can't answer, I don't know. It was dark and I was caught!" She hesitated as if trying to find some way of explaining. An absent look came into her eyes, and several moments passed before she spoke again. "Just as one is caught spiritually," she murmured; "it affected me as a symbol! . . . and I didn't mind. Physical pain is nothing, nothing!"

"How can you know of any other?"

"But I do, I do—and isn't it strangely inconsistent that the real cure for spiritual suffering must always be physical, and physical delight is always destroyed by a spiritual condemnation! Oh!" she thrust out suddenly, "Spirit is the devil, not the flesh!"

He wondered at what she said and found himself answering, "Who knows! The horrors the mind has inflicted on the body of man through the ages would incline one to think what you say is true, if mind is spirit."

"At any rate, something which is the opposite to instinct!"

"Yet cruelty would somehow seem instinctive!"

"I deny it—when it is instinctive it ceases to be cruelty—it becomes justice, imperfect, of course, not cruelty in the real sense."

She bent her head forward and looked at him eagerly as if trying to discover in him the confirmation to her query.

"I wonder," he answered, "why you care so."

"Care! That is my weakness," she said suddenly, laughing. "I care to a frenzy—there is a little passage to my heart that becomes overcrowded with rushing pain and it hammers at the door and oh! then there's the devil to pay."

She was so lovable, so tender—so wildly reasonable in such a mood that all the deep meanings of things would crowd before the imagination, and the nihilist, the doubter, would become stirred to new perceptions, for brief moments would catch a glimpse of unknown things, if only through the eagerness of her eyes.

She cared, that was what after all did count, she cared about abstract justice, and she would fight for the concrete thing to death. Ideas were facts to her, and facts the symbols only, and through it all this strain of agitation was a dear humour, a roguishness that curved her lips into a nascent smile or flickered in her eyes. She was a child-philosopher, and yet physically

sought protection, throwing out the thoughts that stirred her with the same direct simplicity. She had no vanity, and she had warm hands and a red mouth, a deep bosom and straight limbs. There was the woman in the girl, the woman that men always love, yielding, yet the girl that was honest and straight with something of a boy's purity.

A silence followed, the smile was still curving her mouth, her eyes were resting on the tall window that at present was letting in a shaft of mellow light that caught at the bindings, at gilt letterings, and made the rest of the room appear visionary—masses of light, as it were, transformed into heavy mists across which its brighter glimmer fell. Everywhere from floor to ceiling were the countless books, orderly rows with their mystery of aspect which challenged the sight to thought, history and poetry, philosophy and fiction, each with a peculiar identity just in their outward look, some so bumptious or drear, others enticing like an open gate to a flower-garden on a dull road.

"You read very much?" he asked at last.

"No, not at all, now."

"You have ceased to care for it?"

She laughed again.

"It's all so untrue—all special pleading—it matters so little what they say. . . . The untruth is so bewildering! . . ."

"How old are you?"

"A thousand years old."

"You are a child. You are sixteen."

"I am twenty-six."

"That is too young."

"For what?" she asked.

"To be you," he said, and he turned his look to hers.

"Why did you come to see us?" she said in a low voice.

"To find you."

Her regard had not moved from his.

"I want you," she said.

"Child, child, what are you saying?"

Both were touched by a passion that had started spiritually and had merged suddenly into their physical beings; such passion is always pain, infinite delight that remains tragic before its own pleasure, it demands a nearness that only the passage of death could complete —the change called death.

"I don't know," she answered and got up; for a moment she stood still, her wistful face lifted, then she turned and went away, passing through a door he had not noticed.

He could not call her back. A deep despondency came over him. She seemed so remote from him. The lock of the secret door gave a smooth, metallic click as it shut, and the sound reverberated through the room. He felt as if he had sent her away from him and that she would never come back.

At that moment Mrs. Malleson entered the room below. She saw him, and with the inscrutable smile he had become used to expect, she appeared to wait for him to join her. He went down, but somehow found it difficult to speak. She was arranging some flowers in a small box, evidently to be sent away.

"Don't your daughters find it lonely here?" he asked. "You seem to have a very few neighbours."

"Oh! the girls go away, you know. They stay away." She looked at him as if she were not implying the exact truth, and challenged him not to face her with it.

Stronger forces were acting within him, however than any sense of good manners.

"Rene?" he persisted.

"No," she answered with sudden courage, "she does not stay away, but she is never lonely; perhaps it is that she likes to be alone. She is very much alone."

They placed the fragile blooms in the box in silence for some moments.

"She is quite unlike other people," he said.

His listener's eyes met his.

"Oh! yes," she threw at him with a finality that made it incumbent upon him to say no more. Her hands slightly trembled as she took up the string to tie round the little parcel. He took it from her and did his best to speak lightly of just what they were doing. A look of relief came into her faded eyes, and

after a little while she smiled with a sweetness that was wonderful in so habitually a cold face. He alluded to his departure, he meant to beg to be allowed to stay; she anticipated him, however.

"You must not go yet, we are only just getting used to you—at least, Hester and myself." Wrinkles of humour for a moment pursed up her mouth, with a modest suppression of naughtiness which succeeded so beautifully in making one love her. "But Evelyn says you are quite a serious person."

"I should like immensely to stay!" he said, laughing.

"That's understood then."

"You are sure I am not . . ."

"Not?"

"Well . . . a trouble?"

"You are a very nice trouble," she thrust at him with the saddest of sweet grimaces. She took up the completed parcel and moved away. He opened the door for her, then returned to the room, where he remained till lunch, his head in his hands, ruminating, waiting. It was all a dream this strange house, these dear people—and Rene!

In the afternoon visitors came; Grey, too, looked in. Rene was not present, and, during the talk, Stuart slipped out. He rolled a cigarette, and crossing the formal garden, let himself out through the heavy Queen Anne door in the high wall. At once the breath of the

moor buffeted him, the mysterious scent-laden air that is like no other air in the world, whipping the senses to new emotions and the imagination to unexpected goals. He walked a long way feverishly. He wanted to be near Rene, he wanted desperately to be near her, but he wanted, no less, to wake to some reality. To break down the heavy sense of mystery that oppressed and excited him alternately, that made what men under ordinary circumstances can claim so easily, an insurmountable difficulty. He was afraid of the passion that was unmanning him, and the fear came from without, not from within. Unknown forces were surely against him. Before he could, as it were, recognise this caring, before any of its sweetness was to be his, despair was to grimace at him. He was to be afraid like a woman. Was that only part of the mystery of passion—the exchange of the sexes' known attributes, and did it not annul the notion that the feminine or masculine were specialised distinctions, common only to man or woman separately? Were not bodies divided symbols of one essence, apart, incomplete and absurd? So his thoughts spun the old philosophic meshes, gradually quieting the anxiety that oppressed him, yet there remained the sense of an outside interference—some inexplicable forces that separated them.

Then he ceased to think, threw thought off as one does a burden, and there rushed in through the corridors of his soul the messages the senses gather, and

Rene came to him in the impressions of the moor, with the scents and noises, the moving air, the light, the scintillating beauty. Her body is near, he thought she must be quite near. He hastened.

Two men passed him, terrible-looking men, gross, awful, with obscene faces. Gentlemen, he gathered. They were exactly alike, brothers assuredly. A couple of dogs followed in leash, dull-looking animals, beautiful in a way, yet giving one the impression that their bodies were prison houses to their spirit—the heart of them did not, as with their kind, look out of eyes almost human—or fierce; on the contrary their eyes were dull, like those of a man who, all his life, has done some slavish work—never able to lift a thought above the base tedium of it. They were trained bloodhounds. The men, however, were less human; no animal can look quite so bestial as a debased man or woman—flesh, blood and bones, gross passions and no spirit, as if the soul of them had been withheld, and the living motor set upon the world for some terrible purpose, uncontrolled, devastating—not horrible after all, perhaps, since it was only a machine, tumbling to pieces at disintegration,—merely broken matter. He tried not to think of their horrid faces and peered through distances to find some figure that might be hers; he halted—his ghost of the moor was there, the strange, white hound racing to and fro. It was so far away that he could only see it imperfectly, but as it neared him, came with

wonderful speed, yet with a kind of voluptuous ease, he suddenly found Rene just upon his path.

"Where on earth have you come from?" he stammered. "And where is the dog?"

"Dog?" she said—"the bloodhounds?"

"No, I saw them too—but the white hound?"

"I don't know. I have not seen any white hound."

"How strange!"

They turned together and he walked with his head bent, the vision of the creature possessed him, mingling in his happiness at Rene's near presence with a warning significance that became burdensome.

"You have visitors," he remarked lamely. She only looked at him.

"You do not care for people?"

"Not all together. They are never themselves, only manners—and they lie all the time. They listen to their own voices—they haven't the remotest idea of the mechanical play. They are quite sure it is all efficacious, just as savages believed in the hideous images they carried into battle to frighten their enemy. Human beings together are always surreptitiously fighting—they are unconscious of it—only they get tired, you know."

"But is not life, all the time, a little bit what you are describing?"

"I don't know!"

"You like solitude?"

"It is only the crowd I cannot bear, I do not like to be alone, only at times, but I must always be free. They will not let me be free. One may not be free, and so I have to be alone—" a frightened look came into her eyes, "whatever happens."

"What do you mean by free?"

"Ah!—you know—free from their absurdities—all the business of life—all the trammels, the funny lies—the cruelty—the cruelty—that's awful!" Her nostrils dilated and her fingers distended in a strange outward movement—she panted. "I cannot bear that . . . shall we go for a long walk through the woods and forget?"

"Forget?" He looked at her, trying to catch her meaning. "What have you to forget?"

"You," she said suddenly; a wild passion flittered through her eyes, transient yet recurring.

Stuart held his breath. Why did his emotion for her always become a madness? He stretched out his hands towards her in a sudden delirium. She stood quite still, startled, now her full red lips curving to a round, a fragrant rose on the white of her face, dew on its petals.

He dared not touch her here alone in the grey, enticing dells of the moor, the soft couches of nature's making, her passionate purity was a wondrous flame which scorched the desecrater whilst it kindled desire. Their love should be consummated; had it not been in

the look of their eyes at that moment, as they stood looking at one another? Danger encompassed them. Choice would soon be past, if their hands touched they would be gloriously one beneath God's skies! Only the pure have such temptations. The power of the maid conquered, the tender pathos of her voice—the appeal of her words;

"You must help me."

He turned and hurried away from her.

"Little child," he murmured, "little child"—the tumult in his body was hell that awakened love in his heart.

God! and with all was the sense of fear.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE vivid impression of the two awful men he had met in his walk did not leave him. He found it quite difficult not to think of them. They obsessed him as it were. He wanted to speak of them to Rene, but he could not. He learned from Grey that one of them had wished to marry her. That he had caught her unawares alone when she was very young. No one knows quite what happened, more than that she had run away from him in terror—she would not speak of the circumstances, admitting only that he had asked her to marry him.

"Mrs. Malleson was naturally angry," said Grey.

"I should think so."

"Oh, they are pretty awful men, you know," he went on—"like persons in a dream, sort of conglomerate abominations."

"Do you think they can be as awful as they look?" he said. "Haven't we some strong prejudice because they are so ugly?"

"They are not really so ugly, you know."

"They are hideous."

"Look again," he laughed.

"God forbid! They live here then?"

"One of them is Land Agent to the whole estate."

He talked on of them. Together with what Grey told him and hints he gathered here and there, something too from Evelyn, he became cognisant of the place James Crawley and his brother took in the life of this out-of-the-world district.

Lord Carrasbrook it seemed owned half the county —the village and the land for miles. His private residence was small enough—a shooting-box merely, which he never visited. It was occasionally let. His agent had supreme control, and for years had tyrannised over the peasants as only a hireling dare. Backed by the authority of an unknown man, who was absolute master of the earth and all that was upon it for as far as these labouring wights could see, his power was omnipotent. They tolerated oppression as yoked animals, with a passive indifference that must, had there been a known personality—the responsible human being there before them—daily seen—have risen to a violent resistance; but the servant, who simply asserts his master's orders, like the executioner, is unmolested, however hated: even in revolutions the axeman has not been roughly handled. The belief that an agent cannot better things is ineradicable among peasants. With a patient justice, they will refuse to blame the crushing hand, which is simply that of the servant, yet they will bear him a hate that is almost superstitious.

Crawley enjoyed their hate, a gentleman by birth and breeding; a monster by nature, the sense of class

distinction was ever present within him. His right of lordship, as it were, was denied him by Nature's caprice, and he insisted upon his right. Cruel and vulgar, ugly and gross, stupid and cunning, ridiculously floundering on God's earth, he turned the rage of his own inadequacy against his fellow-creatures. "Ragged," it would seem at school and college, concentrated resentment festered within him: he had suffered in his pride, therefore every sentient being should doubly pay for that suffering: the wanton cruelty of his boyish instinct turned in manhood to a scientific scheme to assert his will against all life. The dæmon god in man—that is how one sees it; but perhaps a better diagnosis might be that the creature had no soul, no dæmon, and that his faculties acted without control.

Stuart understood that his brother lived with him in an odd friendship; they were extraordinarily alike, at least in expression: there was a difference in feature, yet to see one was to have seen the other. An observer must recognise with a sense of shock the spirit, or absence of spirit, that made the flesh so terrible. The younger man appeared to depend upon the other; doing his will with a kind of instinctive acquiescence, not so much an imitation as a continuation, as the links of a chain moving together. It seemed a monstrous thing that such men should, as they did, hold in the hollow of their hands the happiness of so many beings, and remain the black shadows, the inexplicable presence, in

this fair country—almost fetishes with the poor. The thousand cruelties James Crawley successfully perpetrated on his inferiors became legends of the place, told with bated breath, and current for miles round. That human ingenuity could find such scope, to the ordinary man is unthinkable; yet the truth of it came to Maxwell as he lived under their shadow. Malice, given a free hand, is surely omnipotent.

"Grey," he said, as they smoked over the fire in the hall, "don't you see how mysterious this hidden county of yours is—the absence so strongly of any influential families which bring with them the civilisation, however decadent, of London, that has at any rate a common sense of order and kindness. This awful man dominating, and you all sitting under it with—I am damned if I don't believe—fear in your hearts."

"Nonsense!"

"And then the white hound—the strange creature that cheats men's visions like a beautiful omen of good."

Grey's brows clouded. He moved his feet impatiently. "How you build up fantastic notions of what you see, and throw them out for your pleasure in prose periods worthy of better matter."

"Why, man, you are angry!"

"You bore me," he said quite gravely.

"Very well, I'll have my revenge. I'll wing the ghost you say does not exist."

He turned round as he spoke, hearing someone come

from the staircase. He did not mean the thing. He said it in banter. Evelyn passed as they were speaking and caught the last sentences.

"I'll wing it," he repeated doggedly.

Grey leapt at him but too late. Evelyn had fallen to the ground a little heap. He stood staring at his companion with dilating eyes, and then came the extraordinary request as he stooped down to the girl.

"I ask you to give me your word of honour that you will do nothing of the kind."

Stuart did not answer. "She has fainted," he said.

Grey lifted her up in his strong arms and laid her on the sofa. "You have frightened her."

The young man sat down by her side and chafed her hands. "Won't you fetch some water?"

She came to after a few moments. "What's happened?" she said, sitting up.

"You fainted."

Grey stood a little apart. She drew her hands across her eyes and looked at Stuart with sudden fear.

"Oh! but you must not, you must not," she cried out.

"Of course not," he said; his blood was cold like ice in his veins.

. . . . . .

Evelyn begged him to say nothing of her fainting. "I am not very strong, and you talked about shooting some imaginary hound. You might hurt anyone pass-

ing; and even if there were one, it would be cruel, would it not, merely for curiosity, to wound the creature? You must promise me."

"Of course, I said the thing merely in jest. I am so dreadfully sorry that you should have heard—and that I . . ."

"Oh! it's all right! After all I was very tired—I had been walking. I might have fainted anyhow, you know," and she smiled reassuringly as she left him. Maxwell went from her to find Rene. He felt as if some harm were near her—that if he did not find her at once he should never see her again. He knew she cared for him, spoken words do not make these things more real, perhaps less—the instinct of lovers is to shun speech, not only because it is inadequate, but because it somehow falsifies the truth of emotion, limits it, entangles and at last destroys.

He found her alone in the verandah outside the drawing-room door; as he approached the retriever Doone came through the garden and up to the girl, placing his nose on her knees in the gentle way big dogs have. He watched for a little time her white hands caress the creature's head.

"Is it your dog?" he asked.

"All dogs are mine," she laughed, "all animals. No, Doone is not mine in the sense you mean, but he is very fond of me, he pays me visits. He is a wonderful person, I think I love him more than if he were mine.

He comes so beautifully to me—really wants me. Mark Grey offered to make him a present, but I laughed and explained that he was mine already. I did not want to have him a prisoner."

"Why should he be a prisoner, because he was yours?"

"It is what all people do, they make a bargain of love."

"It is the human way, one wants the bargain."

"Not you. Ah! not you!" she said.

"Yes, I, Rene."

"Then I shall teach you not to," she said.

"When one loves one wants to possess."

"We do possess, if only we will let there be freedom."

"You are a child, you know nothing—nothing," he said angrily.

A dismayed look came into her eyes.

"I know, I know," she answered, "it hurts me—if only I could escape."

"What do you want to escape, Rene?"

"I don't know."

Some wistful thought kept her still and silent for several moments. Then Mrs. Malleson joined them from the drawing-room. Rene got up, and the dog followed her as she walked down the path towards the gate. He wanted to go with her, having risen as she did, but his hostess kept him with some inquiry that

was obviously a pretext to prevent him remaining with her daughter.

Next morning, at breakfast, he witnessed the first scene that was to reveal to him so much of the trouble that separated his cousins and their mother from Rene. Heaven knows what started the discussion; one fact was obvious, that Rene's very soul was in a blaze of fury, her words fell from her lips, telling, strong, annihilating: Oh! she was provoked, but the storm of her nature was a devastating thing. They answered her with wooden, meaningless words that seemed to hit the poor child's face, and bruise her; still she fought. He perceived at once that they did not listen to, or understand anything she said, their one object seemed only at any cost to crush her. They were stolidly obstinate, coldly polite. He saw the uselessness of her passion and her suffering; the thing became physical, her nostrils dilated, her eyes burned like flames.

It was some question of justice, and the logic of her argument fell among their words—futile words, like a clean thrust of a sword. Only after some time were they conscious of his presence. He had remained by the sideboard, waiting. Rene saw him first, and at once quieted, though he noticed she still trembled. After a little while she got up from her place, and slipped out of the room. Evelyn, who had not been in the fray to any extent, laughed, as she saw her cousin.

"Rene has been fighting us," she said.

"She is a fine fighter," he answered.

"She is very passionate," Mrs. Malleson threw out plaintively. "After all, what does it matter?"

Matter! The word repeated itself in his mind. That was the whole thing! Rene had been fighting for truth: it had mattered to her, down to the roots of her being: the others were merely conscious of a noisy argument, from which they had done their best to escape, by throwing out platitudes, applicable to any discussion, and generally found efficacious, whilst they regarded contradiction as offensive.

"You must laugh at me," she said later, "I should have a greater sense of humour, but I cannot suffer injustice—it burns me—laughter can never cover the pain of others."

"But it protects ourselves, Rene, from the storms of passion, which in their violence may become unjust."

"I do, oh, I do become unjust. Oh! beat me," she said whimsically, and then she added, ". . . why do I feel that you can make me anything? Is it because you have such dear, dear eyes? Many women must have loved you in the great world you come from, yet you seem part of me."

"They don't love there, Rene—they have inclinations and they philander."

"I should have no sense of humour, if my love philandered," she murmured, and she laughed beautifully though her look was full of dreams.

A sharp cry of a dog startled them both. Stuart expected to see the white hound near them and looked hurriedly at Rene, but it was only Doone who bounded out of the wood and came to his mistress, his body quivering with agitation.

"How frightened she looks. Someone has hurt her —her nose is bleeding. There is someone in the wood."

She knelt down, and with her hand soothed the dog, who continued to whine.

"Hush! Doone. What is the matter with you?— don't be frightened, doggie." She glanced up, a queer look overspreading her face.

Footsteps scrunching were audible in the wood a few yards from them. She held her breath, listening. The dog trembled still.

The steps died away, and she rose to her feet. Doone quieted and licked her hand.

"It was James Crawley," she said. "Shall we go back?" She looked pale and tired.

. . . . . .

"I wish to marry your daughter."

"It is impossible," Mrs. Malleson replied, without a moment's reflection.

He moved towards a chair near her. She put down her work.

"I cannot take that as an answer. Rene is of age. If you will give me some reason."

"Don't you understand it is impossible?"

"I do not understand it at all."

"She will not marry you."

"I think differently."

"I know that she will refuse you."

He started; something in the quiet, hopeless reiteration brought home to him the seriousness of at least his hostess's belief in the impossibility of their union.

"You wish to put it on that?"

"Oh no, in any case, it cannot be."

"Your reason?"

"Have you not felt it?"

"Felt what? . . . My dear lady, I have felt that your daughter is the most wonderful, most intelligent, most wise, most beautiful human being I have ever met . . . and I have lived in the world."

"Lover's talk!"

"In this case, no. Grey thinks exactly as I do."

"Grey is in love with her too."

He winced. "I thought, Evelyn."

"They are very good friends."

"She perhaps cares for Grey?"

"She always cares for people."

"Do you mean that she loves him?"

"I don't know, she wants him to marry Evelyn."

"You think she may, all the same, care?"

"Not as she cares for you."

"You admit that I am something to her?"

"We know it."

"And yet you say that she will not consent to marry me."

"No, she will not consent. I cannot consent."

She sat peering at him with the dim sad eyes of resignation.

He saw that she only waited and listened that the thing might be over, that he might understand definitely that her decision was unalterable, outside her power.

"Mrs. Malleson, what is it?" he said, helplessly.

"Hush! do not ask."

"I must, I care for her in a way that men rarely if ever care. I have not wanted to marry. Frankly, marriage has always seemed to me indefensible."

"You speak as she does."

"Ah! I did not know that she felt as I did in that. Still more, are we destined mates."

"To do the thing you both think wrong."

"It is the only way Society will permit me to protect her, to love her, to be with her."

"Listen, she will never consent to marry you, but she will care for you, I am frightened to think how much. Stuart, you are too much of a gentleman to take advantage of this wild girl. . . . She was happy enough, till you came."

"I do not think so," he answered. "I think she has been happier since."

"Because—because she has not thought, the pain of it all will come."

"It need not."

"It must."

Good God! what absurd obstacle, he asked himself wearily, have they invented—what obsession is it that possesses their minds? There is only one thing, that they will not say it—because, great Heavens, it is not true.

"Will you leave it to her?—allow me to at least ask her."

"No, no, I cannot do that."

"You understand then that I shall ask her without your permission."

"If I cannot persuade you, I understand that."

"Persuade me!" he said, violently. "It is impossible to persuade me. Say all that you will, say anything. I am ready. Understand I am afraid of nothing."

Her hands trembled. "There are some things one cannot say, one may not say, one may not even understand."

"Ah! that this imaginary something—the thing that you have invented—that you have made real by believing, till at last even the poor child is affected by it—you propose that I should accept as a serious obstacle to my union with your daughter. Ah! it is preposterous!"

"Then wait, Stuart, stay with us, and wait. You will know."

"What is it I am to know? What! are you so mysterious? Why are you afraid of her?"

"Afraid?"

"Yes, afraid."

"Are you not?"

"God, no!"

He sat silent for several moments, looking out through the window to those strange open lands, which now in the dusk looked ominous, threatening—closing in as it were, as if to separate him forever from any sane world of common-sense, of reality. He was tired of that woman's inexorable attitude, even of the pity that looked out from behind her grey, faded eyes. He did not want her pity, he wanted Rene. He wanted to save her—that was how it had come to him at last,—to save her from the atmosphere of these people; they, not she, were impossible! unsound! afraid! Why should he be afraid of the one lovely thing that had come into his life, the one untouched by commonness—the tender unexacting girl? What perverse and ridiculous understanding possessed them all, even that dear woman, Evelyn?

A quick passion of anger began to move in him, as he glanced back and saw in his companion's eyes the thought that he felt dominated her. He leapt to his feet.

"You think she is mad," he said.

She remained silent. He could not perceive by her expression any confirmation or denial of his question.

"Even so," he went on, "I am ready. Can't you

realise that my love is not the love for a woman? Can you not understand that there is some love that is greater than all personal desires?"

She dropped her eyes, and the colour mounted over her ivory face.

"You are very wonderful," she said. "We have all felt that—the reason surely why we asked you to stay, Stuart, and we did wrong—we cared for you. We could not guess this thing would happen. It has been so easy, *they* have always gone."

He gasped at her meaning. "Men who had loved her."

"Yes, who, as you say, loved her."

"No, they did not love her," he laughed, "they wanted a wife."

"Is not that the meaning of marriage?"

"Perhaps, but never of love."

They looked at one another a long time.

"Tell me," he said, "is it that you think her mad?"

"No."

He laughed. "Then all is well—there is no objection in the world that I cannot meet, dear lady; say the trouble is over."

He took both her hands and held them in his, but a fear crept like a shadow over her face. "Do not tempt me to wrong you," she said, and before he could speak she had left the room.

CHAPTER XXVIII

MEANWHILE with Phœbe, the little maid whose voice had risen up to the stairs and held the old scholar in his attic dreaming, things were going grievously ill. The transition from the supreme mystery of adolescent passion—of giving herself to her man, of keeping the wondrous thing secret, of listening with flushed cheeks for his footfall—to the consciousness of desertion, cruelty and contempt, was quick and awful. The male beast had satiated his desire and morally cuffed the child for a thank you. He maltreated this slip of a woman in some sex revenge for the horror of Rene's rejection, combined with the natural cruelty of a certain species of male whose passion is destructive rather than life-giving: the mediæval monster of the kind one knows enough about, the historians accept him as the mad human of an uncivilised age, yet his descendant survives among us in all classes, only his ways are more secret, woman alone can give testimony to the depths of his depravity. This modern monster terrorised the yielding woman, physically hurt her, humiliated her with coarse and loathsome jests, and left her brutally. The destroyed girl had no understanding to shield herself under the consolation that the man was a loathsome satyr, and she had no knowledge that any man

was different. She had loved him and apparently he had not cared for her, apparently men didn't care for women. This, as with all her other experiences, was life: as a little child, she was beaten and made to work hard, and was half starved, and it had never entered her mind that such existence was peculiar, or to be avoided excepting by just that momentary adroitness that would save her from immediate suffering; just as she would step aside to escape a falling tree branch, so she would lie to save her little person from a cruel cuff. The only morality that had been successfully instilled into her was solely not to draw down shame upon herself or her family in that way young women seemed to, at odd times, for reasons she was not explicitly told. She knew now that that shame was hers; she could not guess at the reason, but she was certain of the fact, and was determined to save herself somehow—the instinct of life and self-preservation. Never for one instant did she blame her seducer. In the true mistress there is always the mother. In her heart she mothered this outrageous brute. Sometimes vaguely she wondered, rather with her senses than her mind, if she couldn't wash him clean—if only from the tempestuousness of his nature! As she could make a room orderly and fragrant by fresh scouring, she had had some inward intimation that she might be able to set things right for him, but the consciousness was very vague, and she stumbled away from it under a cruelty

that at last kept her crouching in hiding. Life was beyond her, and the wisdom she could use for the help of her fellow-creatures she must use just to save herself.

As time went on she gave up all hope that the large women in the kitchen would cease to look at her with suspicion. She feared she could not conceal from them much longer her condition. They were virgins these women, one grossly fat and dropsical, the other gaunt, middle-aged and immense—no kind of love had ever come their way. No man had ever turned the wonder of his kindly eyes upon them. Their bodies were without virtue, man therefore named them virtuous, and they believed, happily for them, in the title. Only one action came under their view as sin, that, the strange and perfect relation between a man and woman. The subtle instinct of sex, perfect harmony of senses of which all lovely creation is the outcome, was to them the only unpardonable commission, and the vitals of their wrath could rise to a frenzy appalling if such came under their blasphemous noses. They did not understand they were blasphemous, these women, who but for their virginity (an ungodly state) were excellent creatures. Few people of better education know the numerous times they do blaspheme. They could cook and do all things that satisfied the lower wants of the human body, even got tired over such duties: they were clean, they did not know that the virtue of cleanliness meant

better life to the little children that were to come, that all domestic life was a wondrous preparation for the mothers such as the despised little scullery-maid. Phœbe, poor heart, had to accept the world's theory with regard to herself. She was, in their eyes, a degraded slut; in her own, she had loved a man who had seemed a god. That he should desert her, deny her, treat her roughly, only seemed part of all that she was ready to bear through life, but she had been afraid. He had told her what to do with regard to her condition and she had been dismayed, incompetent, and it was now too late. He had threatened her if the worst were to happen—the worst meaning the best—and she became terrified beyond bearing—fearful of his anger, fearful of the great women in the kitchen, of the young ladies and all her own class. The world was against her—all the world. More than ever she kept in the scullery and outhouses, the sameness of these places brought her comfort. The rows of pots that waited for scouring, the brown knife-board on the trestles, the miscellaneous bottles in shadowy corners, the blacking brushes, the vinegary scent of the blacking which was stinging to the senses, the dish-cloth hanging on the immense tap, which her young hands had to use their force to turn—all the inanimate things with their peculiar environment, their pungent odours, were friends in her solitude. The wide flagstones, with special formation of cracks and interstices, which she so often

flooded and swept with a hard brittle broom, swishing the clear water over them, were realities in her day-dreams, kind familiarities that kept her sane. She turned from her fear to them. The verdigrised tap gradually growing bright, the brightness of brass, coming up under her hands to such a perfection, brought little waves of satisfaction through her person that were outside her pain. Nevertheless she grew very tired at times over her work, and surreptitiously stole moments of rest. She was getting heavy with child. She never thought of the coming infant as her babe, that had been forbidden her. A miracle was to happen, she understood that it never really would be born. If she could keep her secret, he had assured her all would go well . . . yet everyone seemed to know, and he had not seen her lately. She had gone to meet him, but he had failed to appear, and gradually there came over her the knowledge that he never would; the sex premonition of desertion is peculiarly acute in sensitive women, making their suffering double-fold. Never for one moment did she experience any anger towards her seducer, and hardly any self-pity. Life to her was composed of peculiar circumstances that were to be her lot, and she only sought for the best way out, as it were, of inevitable difficulties. She was uncomplaining and wily at getting the better of most dread circumstances. She was naturally truthful, but lied stubbornly at times over some trivial and unimportant

matter—an unconscious assertion surely of her freedom, an intellectual feat that brought her a peculiar satisfaction—a sheltering of her soul from too prying eyes, she whose body was at the beck and call of all men and women. Such deception stood her for what in her "betters" became simply the right of reticence. She experienced no shame for her yielding, but a deep shame that she was accounted shameful by men and women. She did not for a moment understand, but accepted the thing, with all the rest, as something she must meet with guile. She was not unlike a little furred creature of the forest, who peeps cautiously before emerging from its secret place and has a hundred cunning ways of escape from what would seem overwhelming dangers.

One evening as the light was declining she caught her name being spoken in the firelit kitchen, and her heart suddenly beat with intolerable pain: flood after flood of shame swept over her childish face. They were telling Mr. James—oh! those women, how dared they! Their awfulness appalled her. She listened through the half-open door from her scullery, and the sight of the white inflated obese cook in her immense chair, the light of the fire revealing her pallor, seemed obscene. She was throwing out her insinuations, which were taken up and explained in plain language by the immense gaunt housemaid, whose shadow stretched across the boards of the floor and up the side of the wall like an

inimical emphasis. Shadow and woman, to the amazed child as she listened, seemed one horror.

How warm it was within there! How she would have liked to sit before that great blazing fire, but how dared she go in when they spoke of her so, and Mr. James had been kind to her. Would he believe with them that she was a good-for-nothing slut?

The old man in his black was like a hovering bird caged in between them. Distress was on his face. She listened. He turned, when they had finished, as if he would come to her, and then turned back. She listened again. The mistress must be informed.

Her hands turned cold and clammy. Well, that was to happen then! What should she do? She must think of it! Mr. James had not uttered a word. She listened on: then he said, "Poor little girl!"

She hurried away from the door. She squeezed herself between the copper and a cupboard, and, crouching down, began to cry, her poor body convulsed with pain. To cry when carrying a child in the womb is the most cruel of all suffering, but add to it shame, solitude, desertion, poverty and youth—ah! one cannot write it. . . .

The sound reached the women in the kitchen. They looked at one another. The old man turned pale.

"What's the matter?" he asked them.

"Oh! it's pretty certain what's the matter. She's been listening."

Then in the darkened scullery came the voice: "Child, where are you? Don't cry like that!" But the sobs deepened. A jet of gas was suddenly lit, it gave a shrill whistle as it leapt from its narrow pipe, and the tall housemaid peered about with the vicious enmity of the virgin in her queer eyes. She had no intention of hurting the baggage, but she resented the crying. The frail wench, in the woman's imagination, was beyond the pale of sorrow. Such frailty had no right to weep, and, with a devastating coldness, she told her to be quiet before ever she had discovered the little crushed body crouching between the copper and the cupboard.

CHAPTER XXIX

EVENTS moved towards their unutterable consummation with a sudden rapidity. Inscrutable, inexplicable as they seemed—as are all significant episodes in life—the truth of them was the more awful. How often in the passing of our days, when we receive the lot dealt out to us—the thing so different from expectation—not only our own but that of our neighbours, do we ask ourselves the eternal query "Why?" and the rounded story of it all remains unknown through to death.

Phœbe was sent away, not unkindly, and with money, but she was turned out. The road of the cross this unhappy child had to go, because man had decreed that she should be a certificated wanton and no other kind, that God's motherhood was a sin (vile blasphemy enough that has been raging up and down Christian countries of all dominations for centuries), was more horrible, more gruesome than her Saviour's. Little body, carrying the man child in her womb that she must kill. What had she done? Loved, loved—purely, beautifully, self-sacrificingly, and now she had to be a murderess. There was no way out—her little brain was not big enough to grasp more than one issue of life's affairs. They would stone her, point the finger at her, and let her starve. What else could she do?

She sat on a hillside and trembled. Where should she go? Sacred vessel of God's life, what is to become of you? Animals respect their kind under such conditions! Man surely is lower than these. He is a greater fool—a blustering fool who builds bridges over oceans' passes, reveals nature's hidden secrets, lets free electricity, subdues earth, fire and water, and fills a little mother with fear till she kills the man in her. Oh, he is a precious anomaly, man! In the line that matters most his intelligence is lower than a beast's; his social institutions have beautifully engendered mad virgins on one side, rotting wantons on the other, that a few women may be his special affair, tired mothers of too large families, or women of society without offspring. He has derided instinct as woman weakness, not to be permitted to interfere in wise affairs, and the instinct to protect the woman with child is a laxity to be suppressed.

To follow Phœbe in the road she went is to follow hundreds of her kind who in the past have trodden the same path, the invisible crown of thorns pressing the dishonoured brows; girls who have worked! Always these, who are the deserted mothers—who have not been kept by the male, only used, poor hearts, and poor little saints, with their great burden of Virtue.

Doubtless it is beyond understanding how Phœbe Walsh was attracted into the power of so horrible a type. Unless we find the solution in the influence of

class. He was a gentleman, and no well-bred person can fathom the strange fascination to the lowly of being wooed by a prince—that is what it comes to in their imagination.

The mystery of a gentleman's refinements must intoxicate their senses, accustomed only to the coarsest relations in speech and manners with the males of their class. One can never accept the idea that there is a gross nature in an innocent girl, however led astray—that there is nature, one does not doubt, and that she may become indescribably degraded at last only proves that the spiritual evil in man will act upon all flesh and destroy it. That is the writer's contention—not the supposed evil of matter, but the ignorant blind evil of the spirit that controls it.

Phœbe loved, and in loving shed immortal light on things human, for the moment of her passing—that torture and the cross were to be hers, is the mystery that surrounds all beauty. I think of her quite often, this Phœbe: she is a type beautifully scattered over our world, like certain flowers in our hedges. A young, strong body, white under the sunburn, and above the red and brown of the weather-beaten hands—the innocent mouth, the boyish stride in her heavy boots, the clinging rough skirts brown and stained—cleansed too by the winds of the open air: the broken stay and coarse linen chemise, modestly buttoned high at the neck, and, when loosened, revealing the milk whiteness of her

breasts, the thick masses of hair, bleached at the edges by the sun, and braided back in those tight ropes at her neck. She is fifteen, then she becomes a domestic servant, she is given better clothes, some print dresses of which she is amazingly proud, and a black gown and a prayer book, a bright new prayer book, and at these tender years she is thrown on the world to fight through the age when the spring is in her blood, the mother of her rising to her breasts. New visions come into her eyes, and she is roughly handled by the men of her class. She shrinks—not knowing what is with her—steals away from their haunts and stumbles, poor heart of her, into the presence of what seems all protection—"*the way of a man with a maid*" in a class that is not her own. Unhappy little idealist! and she must horribly pay. To be a mother, and to be shamed!

To have to carry the burden that must be concealed, denied. Monstrous, incredible hope, yet such a hope lived on, and the brave, heavy-hearted wanderer trusted that there would be a way out. The immature little brain had to plan a course with the whole world in opposition—the physical burden in her loins, the moral weight on her heart, the necessity of cunning pressing the brain—a stupid, illiterate little girl with a childish face, who was frightened in the dark, and yet darkness must be what she must seek. They had sent her home, a bundle under her arm and some gold in her pocket—

home! Absurd irony. She doesn't tell them that the door would be shut in her face, that she had seen, when she was a child, a young woman turned out, and had wondered how naughty she must have been. The girl had spoken awful words, and then slunk away, she had supposed the creature was very bad; and now strangely, having little pity for herself, no tears to shed over her own misfortune, her bowels were stirred with compassion at the memory of that other woman, and a flush dyed her pale little countenance at the remembrance of the names she had been called.

When the door in the high wall of Donnington had closed behind her in the dusk she had looked furtively towards the woods and then had hurried towards them like an animal seeking cover, and, in their darkness, her little figure was gradually lost as the shadows deepened over the earth and lights began to flicker in the solitary house from window to window.

James was lighting up. He knew nothing of the immediate departure of the unhappy Phœbe, only on his return to the kitchen the aspect of the women, a faintly cruel maliciousness, the self-righteous pressure of their thin lips and the brightness of eyes, challenging any criticism of the thing done, warned the old man that the hateful business had been put through. He looked silently about the kitchen as if expecting someone to pass through, and then listened to catch the sound of her tread across the scullery stones.

The women said nothing, and he went with a sigh outside, followed only by their eyes. He crossed the dark garden, hardly knowing why, and softly opening the door in the wall peered out into the mists. Which way had she taken? A sharp wind met his old face. There was not a human being visible in the whole range of the receding moor. He closed the door and returned silently as he had come back to the great fire in the kitchen and to the two indomitable women. After a long silence he said:

"There will be trouble."

"I should think so." The cook licked her lips, she folded her hands across her immense stomach as she ruminated sensuously over the trouble to come.

"What can you expect?" she added, her long glittering eyes still at the challenge.

"I meant here," said the old man, almost apologetically.

Both women became alert and defiant.

"Miss Rene," he said.

Then strangely enough they became disconcerted, as if they had been, as it were, found out in some wrongdoing.

"It was the mistress's affair," they asserted.

"Oh, yes, but Miss Rene won't be able to bear it."

"Bear what?"

"This sending her away."

"Well, what else was to be done?"

"Oh! I don't know, I don't know. I hope it will be all right."

"What can be wrong?"

"What can be wrong?" he repeated, only it seemed as if he were saying—Everything, everything.

"They'll take her in?" he said suddenly.

They could not answer in the affirmative.

"She got her wages and over and above—more than her rights."

"I am thankful for that," he said, "but it troubles me for Miss Rene as well."

"As well indeed! You seem sorry for the little artful slut."

"Oh! I'm very sorry for her."

They all looked into the great blazing fire, seeing, in their different ways, the figure of the little outcast, but, mingled with the vision was the thought of Rene, disturbing, undoing. . . . Why had Mr. James brought her in? . . . Then the pattering of a dog's feet on the flagstones outside became audible, no one moved, but their eyes sought one another's with a strange look of horror.

CHAPTER XXX

"RENE, what is it?"

She stood by him, trembling from head to foot, the whole heat of her passion was overwhelming.

He sprang up.

"It is awful," she said, "awful—I cannot bear it."

"Come and sit here," he said, taking both her cold hands in his.

"They have sent the poor girl away. She had been with us for three years—worked for us, and she has been sent away when we ought to have protected her."

"Do you mean Phœbe?"

"Yes, Phœbe."

He could not say anything. The scandal had reached him; he had observed the pretty childish maid with her burden and had wondered in an inconsequent way what was to happen—why she was kept on. The prejudices of centuries were latent within him. This dismissal was the usual thing.

"Your mother thought it best," he lamely began.

"Of course, that is what makes it impossible to bear—a hideous cruelty based upon a pretended right . . ." She paused, and then threw out, "I said dreadful things to my mother—I forgot that she was my mother. I think I was cruel—I felt cruel."

"She understood."

"No, she did not understand. She forgave me, you know, but she could not grasp what mattered—that we, not Phœbe, have committed the sin. . . . She is my mother and they are my sisters"—for a moment a smile flickered across her mouth—"they want a good beating." It faded, however, quickly enough. She got up from her place restlessly. "And no one cares," she said suddenly; "the thing is to be forgotten, not to be mentioned."

"That is the way of the world."

"Damned world! damned world!" she repeated. "What have we to do with it? . . . You and I . . ."

He looked at her oddly. A quick vision of his world swept across his senses—of all its conventions, all its pretensions and its flagrant, impertinent breaking of its own laws—the "time servers" in the one class, the pleasure-seekers among the others, playing into each other's hands to elude all obligations. The "Snatching" Duchess with her bacchante-wreath in her hair, and her petulant mouth; the heavy, coarse financier, bargaining to be tolerated—vice rampant everywhere, and here this poor little person of the people turned adrift because she was to become a mother! . . . and the girl Rene with her tawny hair, her compassionate eyes, the undulating figure of a young Apollo, and behind the straight brows the wisdom of a Cybele, the curved

mouth that would laugh with such sincerity, and the dimples that came with the humorous thought, and around her the mystery of the earth, of the animals, of the birds, of all sentient things that did not speak! Why should she and the little suffering maid, and himself for the matter of that, render account to the preposterous makeshifts of morality civilisation had turned out with its *apprentice hand?*

"They did not tell me till now," she went on suddenly, "and she has been gone two days. I don't know where to find her. They know already that she has not gone to her people. James found out. . . . Ah! can you understand it? . . . It's like a stupid dream. . . . She's a child, if she is over twenty—they say it with bated breath that she is of age! That child of age!—she has never grown up at all. . . . What does it matter what she's done? Aren't we her keepers? . . . It's hellish!"

"Hellish!" he repeated.

"Where has the horror evolved from?"

"Originally to safeguard the woman," he said in a tired way, as if the old shibboleth were hardly worth uttering.

"What a safeguard!"

"It is a deep-rooted idea that a girl should not fulfil her nature, become a mother, excepting on the payment by the male of a price—he must undertake publicly to support her, and if she yields without this payment she

is dishonoured. I grant it is an absurd morality, but what will you, the world has adopted it as a sort of religion. Of all superstitions it is the most awful in its consequence, and the most difficult to even begin to suppress. It has caused vice and prostitution all over the world—madness and murder. There are people enough in the world who know the thing is a horror, and yet there seems nothing to be done."

"Women should refuse to enter the vile bargain of marriage, then all children would be legitimate, there would be no question then of such horror as this."

"Men would always desert them."

She sat down wearily and leant her chin on her hands.

"That is the cowardice of women. . . . Men do it anyhow. Laws cannot make people constant, but they can make people unhappy. They can never create virtue, but they can necessitate sin."

"How would they live?"

She laughed sadly.

"Quite well. The economic reliance of women on men is the huge injustice to men. That is what none of you realise—the peculiar injustice to man. My father," she said, "died that his wife and daughters might live in idleness. Phœbe will commit murder because she dare not have a child of love and work for it—yet she will have to work just the same. I saw a woman die of starvation with starving children round her, because the man was incapable of keeping them. Long ago, as

I was passing with my father late at night in Piccadilly, I saw beautiful women walking up and down, up and down. I was told later that they were selling their flesh to buy food, or to be idle, as our father wished us to be. He killed himself that we might be that. They go on the street to be the same thing because, poor, tired, ill-fed things, they think that is happiness—doing nothing."

"Rene, there is such a thing in the world as viciousness and vice."

Her glance remained unflinching on his.

"Naughty children, that's all—or madness!" she added as a perplexed pensiveness spread over her face.

"And what of that man?"

She turned her head swiftly and a strange look dulled the grave intelligence of her eyes.

"Do you mean Crawley?" She trembled as she spoke.

"Yes."

"You don't think it was Crawley?"

"I know it. I have seen them together constantly."

She covered her face with her hands and groaned.

"Your theories break down, child. There is some evil beyond any explanation."

"That is what is so frightening—one does not reason it—one knows it instinctively, and there is nothing to save one from it—the world from it."

"Perhaps that is the reason of the existence of the

conventions you so deplore, a convention is a stronger power than a law."

"I know, I know, but the conventions have come to shelter the Crawleys, you see—they have become a grotesque thing that protects horror—shields the beast and hangs that poor girl—the convention makes her destroy the child!"

They looked at one another, ruminating on the horrible possibility; both mentally saw this Phœbe, the little maid, who sang and pottered over her business with such inimitable industry and childish importance, being condemned to be hanged by the neck.

"Oh! they won't hang her—no, no, nothing will happen like that," he said gravely, "we are horridly anticipating. She will be befriended. People are wonderfully kind among the poor."

Rene passed her hand across her forehead.

"We must find her."

Stuart got up and paced up and down.

"Yes—that would be the best; but your mother—your people perhaps."

"My people cannot count in this."

"No," he answered quietly. "We will do our best together."

She came quickly up to him and grasped his arm.

"Do you mean you will help me?"

"Of course I will!"

"Ah," she said, "how I love you."

They stood facing one another, these lovers; day after day they had looked all they cared. He had seen the wonder of it in her eyes, but no words had been spoken. After all, were her words more explicit—need he take more advantage of them? Was the spoken thing of more import, or, on the contrary, did not words after all bring a finite meaning with them? She was so brave that she could speak the thing that was deep in her being, and there seemed no need to answer her. She was not waiting for any assurance, or ashamed of having betrayed herself. She did not seem to expect any change because she had spoken, any arrangement in which they were both to be concerned, and yet her love seemed infinite, and between them was the thought of the poor little servant-girl, hiding from her fellows, desperate because the wonder of creation was moving within her.

"We will surely be able to find her!"

"When did she go?" he asked with an effort.

"On Monday."

"And to-day is Friday. Oh! we will trace her."

They stood irresolute.

"She has not gone home—we can count on that, but Heaven knows if she has found shelter. Think of it, she is younger than I am."

"We will go now," he said in a troubled voice.

She left him to fetch her cap. He watched her disappear through the door, but did not move from where

he stood. Dusk was closing in. He looked at his watch and tried to think of the wisest plan for their search, but his thoughts reverted to Rene. An unaccountable sense of fear for her permeated his person—a premonition of some disaster from which nothing could save them. He wanted to shout out, "*Are you there, Rene?*" when she appeared again, hesitating on the doorstep, as if she, too, were overpowered by some emotion.

He went quietly up to her.

"We are going to look for this unhappy girl, but answer me one thing, so that I may have a right to help you. Will you be my wife?"

"No, no," she said. It was a cry, quick, decisive, beseeching.

To him it seemed unreal, something outside her. The tension between them was too strong to take any account of words. He crushed her in his arms and her body clung to his. His lips bent to hers and the beautiful mouth was his in the mystery of passion that makes gods of men and women . . . and, the cynic says swine, and the answer is yes, and swine.

"It is for ever, Rene?"

"For ever!" A note of pain was in her voice. "Let us go—we must go."

"Go?" he said, dazed.

"Phœbe."

"Phœbe!"

"Oh! we must find the child!" he repeated. The shadows were lengthening. It was difficult to move from her—yet they must go to succour the unhappy Phœbe. A haunting fear came to him that their destinies were wrapt up in this quest, that, independently of their wills, this thing was to affect them, that they must hasten to outstrip some evil that was approaching like the coming of a terrible floodtide.

CHAPTER XXXI

THEY both hastened; stirred to the depths of their physical being by mutual desire, this quest became in a sense part of it. Through their own happiness moved the girl's tragic pain who was to bear so much because she, as they, had been a lover. As their eyes momentarily looked in one another's with the same sting of passion, the vision of the pretty child's body came between them to excite their nerves to one pain. With damp hands they clung together in a reassurance against suffering, and waves of faintness pressed through their veins to flow back in warm life, arrested again by the mental vision of Phœbe, heavy with child, hiding God knew where, alone. It was some distance before they reached the village, the turf yielded to their tread, and the moor-scented air, coming up as it seemed from immense visible distances, hovered about them, filling their lungs anew to make breathing, with the other mysteries of the senses, wonderful delight that hurt. They walked in silence and met no one. To both of them came the feeling that they must wander on forever so, and that Phœbe would be saved. The immense skies seemed to reach out and take up the girl for them; they saw a hallowed Phœbe holding the infant child, symbol of the stirring life that was pressing within them towards

unity, and then quickly the human vision again of a cowed, terrified little girl crying out to them.

As the squalid village loomed in sight they hastened. They must learn something here, if she had been seen, if anyone had taken her in. The necessity for practical action braced them as a whip upon the senses. The huddled, forlorn rows of houses, shamefully neglected by the landlords, gave little encouragement of success, and the poverty-stricken people watched them pass with suspicion in their eyes as hungry people do watch, always waiting for some messenger of evil. It was difficult to question them, for the poor degraded pieces of humanity had absorbed with an amazing loyalty, a passionate steadfastness, the gruesome fiction of a woman's fall. The scandal had circulated and doors were shut deliberately in their faces. They hunted the neighbourhood. Rene never grew tired, her fingers now and then moved outwards pressing the air, and her chest rose and fell as one panting. Over and over again he said, "You are tired, we will not go any further," but her eyes only gleamed and she seemed to listen for a distant noise like a hound pricking his ears. They inquired of the peasants about, of the railway officials at the small station four miles away, but no news could be gathered. They returned home and began their search again on the morrow with the same result, and again on the next day. "I cannot rest," said Rene, "I feel that she is not far, if only we could find her."

He pressed the alternative that she may have gone really far away to friends; "She may be safe," he threw out.

"Girls have no friends under such conditions," she answered, "but what can we do?"

"We have done all we can."

They looked at one another with tired eyes.

"That is so dreadful. Oh! we must not give up."

Whether Mrs. Malleson knew of their quest it is difficult to know; but over the house since the departure of Phœbe there hung a gloom that no one seemed able even temporarily to throw off. Neither of the girls nor Mrs. Malleson referred to the maid. The usual habit of English reticence concerning the *un-nice* reached in them abnormal sensitiveness. The servant girl led astray could be no one's affair; she had been given money—not unkindly sent off—the matter had ended. With daughters there could be no other way. To pity a fallen sister was not part of the curriculum of a Christian family, and Rene's concern was regarded as the strangeness of Rene—something they had to bear—and as their eyes met his—mild, gentle eyes—there was an entreaty to forgive Rene with a "you see" from Mrs. Malleson. Yes, he saw, but not what Mrs. Malleson inferred.

What gradually came to him in the following weeks was that Rene suffered from the conditions of modern

life—they pressed on her young soul. The gods had given her a great heart with a keen, penetrating intellect, a combination rarely if ever to be found in man or woman; she could not face the tragedy enacted on all sides that we accept from childhood with unconcern. That she herself was immune, walled in by luxury and affection at any rate from physical privations, only deepened her sense of pity and passionate resentment.

When a forgetfulness was stealing over the lovers through the sweetness of passion, the terrible news reached them. Phœbe was taken up for child murder. She was found huddled in an outhouse, the little dead body across her knees, clutching it in dismay—refusing to leave it, refusing to leave the dead babe she herself had killed. The story was common enough. James Crawley denied on oath the parentage. She was not hanged. After being condemned to death she was sent to prison for life.

Rene, who was in her lover's arms, freed herself, and the pallor of death devastated the face a moment before laughing like a young fawn's. Anger flamed in her eyes with an unfathomable look of sorrow.

"We have done it. We have sent a girl to prison for life," she said. "You all—all of you for countless generations have done this awful thing in the name of religion—frightened a mother into killing her child because she may not have bargained to be expensively provided for—paid with a home and a ring and cere-

mony. We made it necessary that she should kill her child."

"Rene! Do not be so cruel," said Hester, with some compassion for her mother.

"I, cruel!" She stood still looking at them, her pale tragic face for the moment crossed by an expression of wonder.

Mrs. Malleson was crying silently.

"I can only see the prison," she answered. "Phœbe in prison! We may cry forever, nothing can make her free again, nothing we can do." She turned after a moment and went out of the room.

Stuart moved to Mrs. Malleson's side.

"She does not mean to hurt you," he said.

"She is frightening," said the little lady, pathetically; "I am her mother."

"Mother!" he repeated inwardly, and thought of the girl who had killed her child.

CHAPTER XXXII

She became ill. Not in a way that help could be given. Fever burned in her continually, her physical vitality was being consumed before their eyes. Dr. Martin, when questioned, was optimistic. "She will rally all right," he said. "There is nothing seriously the matter. Her temperature is high—abnormally high, but it does not increase—on the contrary, at times abates. Quiet, simply quiet—and don't leave her alone. Solitude is a peculiarly dangerous state. It is not only the question of nursing that has inclined the human being from all time to tend its sick day and night, never to leave an ill person alone, but a more profound instinctive necessity which has given rise doubtless to a thousand superstitions, but the thing is fundamentally right. We protect each other more than we know . . . we make and unmake each other all the time. . . . She will get well."

Nevertheless, Stuart surprised a troubled look overshadowing the physician's face when he supposed himself unobserved; moreover, he became reticent when there was any question of diagnosing precise symptoms.

"What is the matter with her?" he received simply with an absent look. The medical man of him seemed at a loss, in spite of a protesting optimism that after all

surely covered an unprofessional anxiety. The women of the house, too, seemed abnormally on the watch and restless. He came upon Mrs. Malleson weeping when he had had a good report of Rene's progress. She thought herself alone in the library. Stuart, appalled, went at once up to her, he took both her thin hands in his. She broke down, the little frail body convulsed with a sobbing that had to come.

"But she is better, Mrs. Malleson."

He moved to the window and looked out into the warm sunlit garden, remembering the first day of his coming, and wondered what horrible end was yet in store for them. He felt impotent like a child. Tighter and tighter the meshes of inevitable happenings were closing round them. The atmosphere of dread weighed on everyone, inexplicable, incommunicable. Why had he not taken Rene away, away from this miserable place? If she would only get well. He returned to his hostess's side.

"She is better," he repeated.

"I know, I know," said the little woman, but her tears did not cease.

He swept his mind for something to say, and found himself only looking questioningly into the aged eyes.

"You are over fatigued," he said at last.

"Yes, yes," she answered eagerly, "that is it. Please don't think anything of my agitation." She moved to a chair. "She will be better soon, you know."

"And then I must take her away," he said.

"You will take her away?"

"Yes."

"Well, we must talk about it when she is up . . . you mayn't want to—"

"That is an extraordinary thing to say."

"Well, but isn't that what we have been trying to make you understand? Rene is . . ."

He interrupted her.

"Haven't we threshed that out?"

"I'm afraid not."

"Then tell me, in God's name, whatever there is to tell."

"I can't, I can't, because we don't know."

"What don't you know?"

Hester at that moment entered the room. Her brows were lowered. She glanced questioningly at her mother. "You look tired, mother—you had better go and lie down," and Mrs. Malleson assented pathetically, going from the room as if eager to escape from him.

Stuart wandered restlessly about the house. He was permitted at certain times to be with Rene; at times she was unconscious, at others her grave eyes rested on his, appealing and bright, and her hand held his as if she were in some danger.

One day Stuart, outside the room, heard a struggle within and instinctively moved to the door; it was

locked and the audible struggle went on. What was happening? James appeared suddenly.

"What is the matter, do you think, James?" he asked with an awful fear at his heart.

"Delirium!" said the old man at once.

"James—"

"Yes, sir."

"It isn't delirium."

"They are . . ."

"Hush!"

Stuart staggered back, then he battered on the door. "Let me in, doctor, let me in." But the strange scuffle continued.

James's hand was on his shoulder.

"Don't, sir, don't," he deprecatingly began, when the door was flung open, and Dr. Martin with a tired look faced Stuart.

"She is insensible!" he said, "come in." He put his hand on the young man's arm.

"She will be like this for some time. If you wish to help her you must not get so excitable. You mustn't, you know, interfere. It is little that I can do! What do you think *you* can do, young man? Ah! here is Miss Evelyn. Come down now, Mr. Stuart, with me. You mustn't get ill yourself."

"Oh! I am all right."

"Well, come into the garden with me, will you, and look at the roses, and get her some. Do you care for

roses? In their hearts all people care for flowers—they disarm one, they hold the peace of unconsciousness with the beauty of sentient life. Where does it all begin and end, this wonder of life? Science doesn't tell us much. It makes brave agnostics of us at first, you know, but, Lord! man, Nature laughs at our efforts. Miracle!—oh, it's everywhere, in the unaccountable beauty of roses, and in that child. . . . Mrs. Malleson tells me that you wish to make her your wife."

"I wish to make her my wife."

"Well, you must wait."

"I will wait."

"Of course, if you have the courage, take her, man! I mean the moment she is well. Take her away from here, and give her all the love you know how—nothing will be too much. . . . Well, I must go—patients waiting. Did you ever see such roses?—look at them—look at them!"

CHAPTER XXXIII

COURAGE! Wasn't it his only desire to take her off at once—to lift her out of surroundings that were sinister and destroying in some intangible way? Had he the least concern for anything in the world but just Rene? Had the world anything to offer him which could in any way balance life without her? He had no axe to grind, no ambition for place, and an absolute fatigue of the ordinary pleasures and routine of existence led by men of his class. Marriage had always affected him as a preposterous barbarous bargaining; nevertheless, with every nerve of his body and vibration of his brain he wanted to marry Rene. A deep humility filled up the corners of his consciousness before the unspeakable happiness that would be his if he could win her. There could be nothing these absurd people feared that might reach even the edges of his resolutions, or do anything but strengthen a passion that was spiritual as well as physical—that demanded of the gods just this woman under any conditions, or nothing. Her illness had brought him to a feverish anxiety that could not wait on patience: the humorous faun-like face, with the curved mouth, that might be cynical but for its kindness, had become drawn and grave.

At last the day came when she seemed so much better. Dr. Martin was still anxious, nevertheless he admitted that there was progress. Stuart was with her now continually. She was up, and had been out in the garden several times. At first, the fresh air had stimulated her to a shy happiness with him. They brought a chair out, and cushions, and she had laughed at the fuss. "Isn't it delicious getting well?" she had said on the last day, but the very question brought between them the reason of her illness—the vision of Phœbe, far away in a prison, and the shadow of a living horror fell over her face.

Stuart turned cold. . . . How could one save her from it all?

"The very sunshine is dreadful to me," she said, "when I think of her in the greyness of her cell. I cannot bear to look at the flowers. She had a way of talking to them—petting them. When she came in from the village there were traces of them clinging to her clothes! . . . Do you remember how she sang? How she used to sing. They wanted to stop her, you know. . . . They have stopped her now, haven't they?"

The tears welled into the girl's eyes.

"Don't cry, Rene."

"Oh! it's monstrous to cry, one ought to do something."

"We can do nothing."

"It's the horrible law."

"Yes."

"Couldn't we—couldn't we somehow?"

"No, Rene."

"Oh! I am so tired," she said suddenly, "with strength, not with weakness—the strength that is in me and that I must not use."

He put his arms tenderly round her.

"You must forget!"

"I can't."

"Rene," he said rather pathetically, "won't you think of *our* life?"

"Caring is great pain, Heart," she answered.

"Wife."

She pressed her hands on his chest softly, and looked with wistful love into his eyes.

"You have such blue eyes, and they are like a fawn's; behind their laughter is sadness, and behind their sadness is laughter—one has to love you, you know. I had to, right from the first minute! Did you care for me like that?"

"Right from the first minute, Rene," he smiled sadly.

"Isn't it strange?"

"But I have loved a great many people!" she added.

"Oh!"

"I have always loved someone, and it used to hurt.

I think because they weren't the real persons, you know. . . . And you?"

"I have not loved anyone but you, Rene."

"Ah! you mustn't say that. . . . It can't be true. What is the use of not being truthful?"

"There have been women in my life, and I have always hated them."

"Stuart! Do you mean when you cared for them?"

"Yes, when I cared most."

"Oh! don't hate me."

"Child—child!"

"Why, there are tears in your eyes!"

"Rene, get well—get well—we are going to be married quite soon, and I am going to take you away."

She leant back. A shadow fell over her face again.

"I cannot marry you, boysie."

"Why do you always say that? You know that we are going to marry, and quite soon."

"I love you too much," she said.

"Listen; we will go away from here—and—and—we will be happy," he ended lamely.

"But the horror!" she said.

"There shall be no horror."

"People are terrible. I am frightened of all people."

"Not of me, Rene."

"Not when you hold me so," she said.

She released herself, a pallor swept over her face.

"I will live with you, if you want me—but I will not marry you. . . . It is all I can do for Phœbe!"

"Good God! Rene."

"We owe it not only to Phœbe, but to all the women who have suffered as Phœbe has, and to the children that are to be—there shall be no illegitimate children because there shall be no legitimate. There shall be no more killing by mothers because there shall be no more shame. Oh, it's a wonderful thing Society has done, to make maternity shameful! Very well, I shall be proud, my heart, to be shameful. I am thinking that God will be on my side."

"We cannot fight like this—the odds are against us."

"Do we care? Someone must begin." She moved restlessly, and then, with a quick change of mood, she said, "Let us go out . . . boysie, boysie," she said, with infinite tenderness, "do love me!"

He gathered her in his arms.

The moor was enshrouded in the tenderest mist, opalesque here and there to reveal the distant unattainable alluring blue. Beads of moisture shimmered on the blades of the olive-coloured grass, the wood on the horizon appeared dark and unfathomable. All was warm and still. The road glistening white ascended to a curve of land that made an arc against the skies. The lovers stood outside the door, that cut a panel in the

ancient wall, and, when open, revealed the dark yew trees, the shorn lawns, and the tiled paths suggesting a warm sanctuary from the wind-swept plains, that were drowsing for the nonce in a sunlit haze.

They looked at the horizon, irresolute, then moved simultaneously towards the winding road. They did not talk, their fingers interlaced, the hungry love within them both was quieted to an ineffable tenderness which touched only momentarily the nerves of passion as their eyes met. Their talk had in a sense tired them to an acquiescence just in physical happiness. Both these beings were capable in a high degree of such a reaction, as are all sensitively intellectual minds; the reaction from keen spiritual insight takes its rest in almost an excess of sensuous peace, and often after some strenuous suffering in a happiness, avenging as it were the destroying power of mentality.

They wandered along, without foreboding, without memory, and the figure of a man, suddenly looming out of the mists on the curve of the horizon, affected them only as a point to hold their vision, as it were, in a purely absent curiosity; but as it approached, as the slouching, horrid gait woke up a consciousness of familiarity, Rene shivered, and her hand closed convulsively upon her lover's, their minds became alert, and they stood still. Sweeping through every nerve of their bodies was a sense of outrage, of a devastating, awful interruption.

"We cannot get away," she said desperately, and remained rigid.

For one moment Stuart recognised an appeal in her look, then the human expression went. He caught her fear, and an unreasonable desire to hide at any cost from the approaching man came over him. He sought from her in a glance some solution from their predicament, but a film glazed her eyes and the rigidity of her body was that of an animal before a spring.

"It is James Crawley," he said, with an effort at indifference.

"James Crawley," she repeated, and they both moved forward.

After all it was but a question of passing, the road was wide enough. What was he to them . . . or, Stuart tried to enforce upon himself, even Phœbe?

The man however stopped a few yards in front of them and held them, as it were, prisoners of ceremony. Stuart looked at his face, at the inhuman disgustingness that had appalled him beyond measure on that first day. The thought of Phœbe deepened in his conscience; Rene's description of the flowers clinging to her person, and the remembrance of the shy, agitated little girl, always with an air of waiting anxiously to do someone's will, whilst childish secrets were held, hidden behind the gravity of her innocent eyes, stirred the man of him to a sickness of horror. She was im-

prisoned, working far away with the lowest criminals, whilst this satyr was free. . . .

Rene was facing him, and it came to him suddenly, overwhelmingly, that the man was lost. Some humane instinct induced him to move a step as if to save the miscreant from her, the instinctive action that is impartial before some imminent calamity. It was hardly conscious, and wholly physical; the man's immediately speaking, however, seemed to bring things for a moment to a normal reality.

"Good-afternoon, Miss Rene."

She did not answer. Stuart caught the glitter of her eyes, which rested unswervingly upon the man.

"That dog!" he said.

"What dog?" Her response, low and incisive, came on the white edge of heat.

"Doone! Isn't its name?"

"Doone!" she repeated.

"It was, at any rate, in the enclosures—we have been obliged to shoot any dogs found. . . ."

"Well?"

"I shot the dog." He horribly showed his teeth, as a dissector might when touching the wanted nerve with his knife.

There was a pause, vibrating, awful, Stuart felt rooted to the ground. He found himself saying "Fool, fool," and waiting, just waiting.

In a moment she was upon him, her white-clad figure,

slender, supple, leapt to his throat. She hung as a hound upon its prey, worrying. She tore at his flesh by the jugular vein and scattered his blood. The man fell dead, a horrible heap upon the ground. One instant she swayed on her feet, lifted her head, and with dilated nostrils scented the air, then leapt away with the ease and agility of an animal.

Stuart stood passive—further and further from him she went, with rhythmic speed, the white hound of the moors.

CHAPTER XXXIV

He watched the creature disappear in the wood and then covered his face with his hands. Courage, courage, he found the inward man of him pressing on his consciousness. He became cold to his finger tips—but only courage! What had happened? Not surely what he imagined he had seen. A numbed sense was paralysing his recurring powers and he wondered if, perhaps, he were going to faint. He mechanically stooped down, conscious of some duty to the prostrate man. Crawley was dead, and his blood trickled in the white dust of the road, and everywhere spread the desolate moor. He thought suddenly of that first day, when he had driven through the mists, and had seen the white hound in the far distance. Again he pressed his eyes in his hands to shut out all sight, that his spirit in the darkness might recognise some meaning in the awful tragedy that hemmed him in, beat at his heart—was part of himself—of all his senses, and yet was so absurdly unreal. She had killed this man. Had she then in a sense killed him? "The fair delicate girl was what?" No, it was an hallucination. He hadn't seen rightly. . . . And that fear displayed by her family? . . . The horror that, time after time, had deepened in the eyes of her sisters and mother! . . . what had it been but a knowledge of . . . of what? He denied it!

. . . Yes, he denied it! The thing was preposterous and untrue. This man had been attacked by a mad hound, a wild creature, seen often enough in the neighbourhood. Who could gainsay it?

A shadow fell across the dead man's body—silently someone had stolen up. Stuart hardly dare lift his eyes. Had there then been a witness? And what had become of Rene! The strength of his caring for her possessed him suddenly with a warm flow of resolution. He would fight to the end. Slowly he raised his eyes, and gave a little cry of alarm as he recognised the dead man's brother, holding in leash the bloodhounds he had seen with the men not long since. A grim, awful smile distorted his white leprous face, as if the death of his brother was less significant than the sweetness of his revenge.

"Hold them in!" cried Stuart.

"Why should I hold them in, Mr. Maxwell?"

"God! man, if you do not, I will kill you."

"I don't think so . . . there has been enough!"

"It was an accident—some wild dog!"

"Ah! well, you see I saw her do it."

"Do what?"

"Kill him."

"How absurd! A girl and a strong man! Who would believe you?"

"You too were a witness."

"My evidence would not support you. I saw noth-

ing but the sudden fall of your brother, and the escape in the distance of a hound."

"Then there is no reason why I should not let the bloodhounds follow the trail."

"Hold your hand, man."

He laughed horribly.

"Enough!" He stooped down and loosened the strap.

They stared at one another. He gave a command, the creatures nosed the earth and then were off.

"You have been a witness, sir, of the murder of my brother."

"I have witnessed the death of this person."

"Ah!" he said, and looked towards the retreating dogs, whilst he took out his watch. "They will not be long," he said, and turned on his heel.

Stuart staggered away. He was helpless before the omnipotence of this monster. He walked in the direction she had taken, at first deliberately and at no great pace. His heart beat to suffocation. Gradually he quickened his pace. Terror deepened within him when he tried to realise what must follow—all the end of it. He began to run. . . .

The man had been killed by a hound, but where was Rene?

He tried to reconstruct in his mind the scene that had passed, to convince himself that the hound had intervened between the man and the girl, and that Rene had fled in the mists, whilst he had been watching the re-

treat of the wild dog. After all, the bloodhounds would not necessarily overtake the creature. Still he hastened the way it had gone. These quick, reassuring thoughts were only accompaniments to the real fear that throbbed through his veins like a material presence in his blood.

Far ahead of him were visible the bloodhounds, their noses to the ground, going at an even pace with the peculiar gait of creatures on an uncertain scent. At the confines of the wood they hesitated and ran momentarily backwards and forwards, to enter suddenly with the swift leap of the hound picking up the trail.

So long as he could see the animals and nothing before them but the open country his fear was held in abeyance, but as the darkness of the dense woods swallowed them up he turned sick with apprehension, and in an effort to increase his speed he found a weakness overtaking him which threatened to defeat his efforts. He kept his eyes on the spot where the animals had entered, and, on reaching the wood, pushed an entrance through. He stood still, listening; it was impossible to know which way they had gone, there was hardly even a path, and it was difficult, as he started on again, to make any progress. The underwood after a time, however, grew more sparse, and vistas opened before him of slender trees rising from the brown soil. He stumbled on, a rage of hope in his heart, of denials, of reassertions, of despair, of belief and disbelief. He shouted her name, his voice only echoed back to him,

reverberating through the great silence. The woods grew dense again and the way difficult. For miles on these trees climbed the low hills on the confines of the moor and filled the hollows. He had to rest at last.

His search seemed vain. He must have been walking for hours. His eyes were bloodshot and his hands trembling. He leant against a tree and peered with tired eyes through the interstices of the interminable trees. Something of delirium came over him, the wood became an inimical, horrible presence, alive with a consciousness. For its very silence seemed to hold awful secrets. What might he not see here in this vast house of nature following what he had seen? Gruesome visions came before his tired brain. Who could say what was real or unreal? Lewd physiognomies peered at him. Satyrs more awful than any in Greek mythology materialised and dematerialised, faces of the world in London, and the women he had cared for, the absurd aristocrat, shorn of her glittering gowns, grotesque and leering, who had let fall her desire "to snatch."

At one moment he was sane and alone, at another he was hustled by forces that momentarily became visible in hateful shapes, ultimately evolving into those of the murdered man and his satellite brother. He stumbled on. Dusk began to settle, a grey orderly mantle that was to cover things before the wondrous revelations of darkness.

At last he came to an open green place, one of those sanctuaries of the woods where the sky is suddenly visible and the light pours down on an emerald ground patterned with flowers. Exhausted, he sank on his knees. His clothes were torn, and his eyes bloodshot, and perspiration poured down his forehead, the humorous faun-like face was distorted with pain. . . . Suddenly he cried out, for not very far from him surely Rene was lying, white as only the dead can be, and round her were encircled the little animals of the forest, the squirrels and other furred creatures, and at her feet crouched the bloodhounds, submissive, patient, guarding. Rene was dead! Rene was dead!

A noise behind him of a pushing aside of the underwood and a heavy gait made him turn his head, and he knew what he would see. The murdered man's brother had followed, wandered as he had wandered, only in a lust of cruelty, the lust of the hunter; his face was crimson from exertion and his eyes protruded, he swore as he came, and the haggard faun-like face of the young man peered at him with a look of momentary triumph. The monster was defeated! His diabolical intention to hunt his game was frustrated!—the bloodhounds had become guards and the girl was peacefully dead. Maxwell turned with a groan. What could anything matter since she was dead? Even this horror might go his way. He came striding up to the young man; visible lust for his legitimate prey horribly marked him civil-

isation's beast. The law was on his side; in a moment, however, he gave a frightful cry, staggered and covered his eyes as a man in terror.

Rene was no longer there. In her place lay a white hound.

Maxwell gripped the cowering man's arm.

"Your brother was killed by a hound, and the hound is dead," he said fiercely.

The man did not answer, he dropped his hands, and stared before him.

"What are you going to do?"

"Hush!" he said. "She is dead!"

"You and your brother have killed her."

"We have killed her, but it's only a dog, you know!" He spoke in a whisper, and with a tone of pleading, as if begging for some kind of acquittal.

"That will not save you!"

"No! no!" he continued, staring before him. A haunting pain now lived in his eyes. He sank down on the ground, resting his hands on his knees. "A miracle! A miracle!" he murmured.

He no longer seemed horrible to Stuart, he no longer awoke any antipathy. He looked a tired and broken man. The strange secret they shared seemed to link them oddly together.

Darkness everywhere was falling. Stuart staggered to his feet.

"We must go," he said confusedly—"they must be

told something!" He looked down at the man and felt that he could not leave him. "Come, you are not well. She is safe here. We must go."

Crawley got up and moved as a man in a dream, his eyes still on the dead hound and its silent guards. He made no attempt to call off the bloodhounds. He put his fingers on his lips. "God!" he muttered.

Stuart pushed forward. . . . Over and over again in his heart the words repeated themselves, "Rene is dead, and I am here alive, treading these absurd paths. . . . I have got to live"—but it never seemed the truth, so the repetition had to continue. . . . "I have to tell her mother and sisters—what can I say? . . . What, too, of the dead man?"

He looked sharply at his companion.

"Your brother?" he said suddenly, with some fierceness, and then felt ashamed, for it was an old, shattered man who was with difficulty dragging himself along.

"Was bit by a wild dog," Crawley answered quietly.

The tears rose to Maxwell's eyes and he hurried ahead. He must get to her people and then back to the green sanctuary where the hound lay. The wood seemed endless. He missed the way and he stumbled miserably at times, almost unconscious, for sharp pains were piercing through his brain, and dizziness at moments blinded his eyes.

He came out of the enclosure on to the moor, a mile

perhaps from the house, from the shadow of the wood; the moor a clear brightness in the twilight, its undulating beauty seemed to hold a mocking message of peace. He was stung to hasten, and pressed on. What was he to say to them? . . . Had the thing happened? Was it true? How was he to tell them that Rene was dead?

At the door in the wall at last he hesitated. It was open. There was nothing to hinder him going in. He desired to go in at once, but could not. . . . How was he to utter the awful thing? He looked up the path to the first entrance.

Evelyn suddenly appeared on the threshold. She looked pale and disturbed as if she guessed at ill. He turned sick at the thought of what he must say and tried to speak. They looked at one another, it seemed to Maxwell, a long time. He found it impossible to utter a word. How explain? . . . The remembrance of the murdered man, lying perhaps even now on the white road, appalled him anew. What had such horror to do with the fair serenity of this girl? He saw, in his mind, Mrs. Malleson within, her still, ivory-like face incapable of displaying violent emotions. How could he approach her fastidiousness, break through the barrier of a gentle ceremoniousness always her atmosphere, and reach grossly to her soul with a satyric hand? . . . Would it not kill her?

"What is it?" at last came from Evelyn.

He looked at her almost angrily, and then said, stupidly, "I have something to tell you."

"You are ill," she said with concern. "Where have you both been?"

"She won't come back," he cried, and was aghast at the sound of the words; they seemed to go with a swift speed and hit the girl. He put out his hands as if to save her from a physical blow, and she missed their meaning and only looked at him oddly. "Rene," he repeated.

"She has been home some time. Dr. Martin is here —she is worse!"

He staggered up to her.

"Don't say it, if it isn't true. I couldn't bear it, you know—I think I am ill. Did you say . . ." he began to laugh, "that Rene was upstairs?"

"Yes."

He leapt past her, reached her room, God knew how.

She was lying on her bed, her face was serene as one dead, on the edge of her lips was a spot of blood. Both Mrs. Malleson and Dr. Martin were present.

"Is she dead?" he spoke quietly. His hollow bloodshot eyes sought theirs in a pathetic resignation. The doctor looked up quickly.

"She will be all right in a few moments," he answered.

The room grew suddenly dark. He staggered and fell at their feet senseless.

CHAPTER XXXV

The death of Crawley came to the people with a sense of horror and relief. They did not discuss it. They looked at one another, cursed, and went their way. They never alluded to the white hound. The profound instinct of the peasants' nature was roused to a strange mutual consciousness, to a secret understanding, the verbal utterance of which no human power could draw from them.

The hideous enemy had come by an awful death! That was all, and their folk would lift themselves up from the oppression that, like a nightmare, had weighed upon them for twenty years. Moreover, no new man could play such a game again, the spell had been broken. Life was renewed in their blood—the young generation had grown up betimes and emancipation was stirring among their kin all over the world, the vibration of it had not failed to reach even their sequestered spot of the earth. Man was awakening to a new knowledge of his birthright, and the revolution in these villagers' hearts was set free by this awful occurrence—out of the blue as it were. The death of this man was to be life to generations of human beings, though only the mystery of its consciousness stirred at first within them.

It was difficult to find help to remove his remains

to shelter, and as the body was carried through the village children over their play were hastened within and the doors closed.

At the Coroner's inquest the verdict was reached quickly enough. The deceased had been attacked by a mad dog of unknown ownership, which had been observed in the neighbourhood for some time. His brother had been a witness of the onset, and the doctor's evidence bore out the undoubted truth of his statement. The deceased had died of a very terrible wound at the throat. Witnesses were called to testify to the presence in the neighbourhood of a wild hound, but little information regarding it could be obtained from them.

The Coroner observed a combination of facts which perplexed him not a little: the unanimity of the witnesses, and an air common to them all of holding back something, added to a curious impatience, an apparent wishing the thing done with, a lack of curiosity, unusual in his experience on such occasions; all went to suggest something queer in this business yet something quite intangible.

The shadowy room of the inn, a bleak place, in which the inquest was held, emphasised the sense of mystery. Both witnesses and jurors seemed stirred by some similar emotion; they avoided each other's eyes and watched him anxiously.

"What the devil's up with them?" he asked his clerk.

The clerk shrugged his shoulders.

"More than one sees."

"Well, aren't we here to find it out?"

"Try!"

The monosyllable was disconcerting.

"Well, there's simply nothing to go upon."

"Precisely!"

"They are unanimous!"

"Precisely!"

And under his breath the Coroner muttered "Damn your precisely."

The verdict was recorded and the meeting broke up. Everyone dispersed as if glad to get away. No groups of idlers, habitually seen on such occasions, stood about outside to discuss the proceedings.

The Coroner drove away through a silent and apparently deserted village.

CHAPTER XXXVI

It was many weeks before Stuart was convalescent. Brain fever went its apparently destroying road to ultimately save the human sufferer from madness. Rene nursed him. A changed Rene, the mystery had gone from her, the wonder of her remained. She nursed him with great tenderness, and when he first woke to sanity and sought in her eyes some answer to the horrible past he met with no conscious response. They told him that her memory had gone, that she could recall nothing of the incidents of that last walk about which, after all, they themselves knew little enough. She remembered nothing of Phœbe, and only in a vague way anything of Crawley. She talked as she had never done before of her father's death, spoke of him with the same great love, but without any of the unhappiness. She had gone up into the study, which she had so long avoided, with Evelyn and had arranged things with a serene happiness, speaking tenderly of the beloved dead without alluding to his tragic end.

"Why have I never brought Stuart up here?" she had questioned her sister, with a touch of trouble in her eyes, as if she were seeking back in her memory for touchstones, and were hurt by the effort; Evelyn had interrupted quickly:

"Oh! but you must bring him up."

"I have told him so little about father," she added wistfully. She touched Evelyn's hand as if she would be reassured from responsibility of some neglectfulness.

Maxwell observed that a change, too, had come over the family. The quiet satisfaction of persons suddenly released from some overwhelming trouble—the fear had gone from their eyes. He lay still and pondered with the idle wonder of a person not strong enough to question facts. Things were so, and what did anything matter since Rene was with him? She seemed so well, was so warm, so dear, the firm-breasted woman-girl, whom men have to love willy-nilly, what did the past signify? It was gone! And then there came a day when Dr. Martin remained with him longer than usual, and Stuart realised that they were to speak of Rene. For one moment fear gripped his heart. What power had this big man to crush him anew?

"Rene is quite well now?" He put the question assertively as if ready to fight any contradiction.

"Perfectly," answered the doctor.

"There is no reason why we should not be married?"

"None."

"Ah!" Stuart looked into the doctor's eyes and tried to read their inscrutable, kindly glance. "There was a reason?" he threw out.

The heavy man rose from his seat, moved about the

room easily as if just waiting for some trivial happening. Stuart expected him to allude to something quite other than the subject under discussion, as he was wont to do when closely questioned. He did, however, come back abruptly to the point.

"Do you desire me," he said, "to explain the inexplicable?"

"I would have you tell me just the simple facts."

"There are no simple facts to be told! We are ignorant. I can only say that from a medical point of view Miss Rene, immediately after the death of her father, suffered from some strange agitation which affected her health and that defied all medical science. . . ." He paused and added, "He committed suicide."

"Malleson?"

"Yes."

"Good God!"

"Well, it was to save them! Not to escape trouble, but actually to give them life. She and myself alone, knew. Unfortunately, I was not aware she knew it. . . . Well, the horror of it did not kill her—her soul seemed to take refuge in life, not death, in life without the burden, we can only suppose, of mind. She has returned to her normal self through some shock equally violent."

Their eyes met and the tragic story was visualised by them both. Again there was a silence.

"I do not feel that there will be any relapse. If all her memory should return, you will be with her, and I do not think you need fear anything. Remember that her mind is the sanest I have ever encountered in man or woman. It is perfectly balanced. She is the worthy daughter of a great man who was . . . but take her away, take her away and love her. She needs to be loved. Women need that . . . it is their great need."

An odd pause followed.

"That is all you will say?"

"What else can I? . . . I am convinced that she will remain as she is. . . . For the fantastic side of this affair, I believe nothing."

"You believe nothing! . . . What was the fantastic side?"

He laughed nervously.

"Life is a mystery in spite of exact science! Do you want me to explain to you the infinite? Because I can't, nor could Darwin, but it stirs within us all the holy of holies that is indestructible!"

. . . . . .

Had it all happened!

As he grew stronger he began to doubt. He lost any exact remembrance of each occurrence. Rene was wondrous, and warm and dear. Rene, without the pain that had lived always behind her gaiety; and only now and then, watching his own thoughtfulness, did her

eyes suffuse with a little troubled look, as if trying to find the key of his questioning attitude.

They were to be married soon, when he was strong. She laughed when he spoke of it, and, when she laughed, she was wondrous to the undoing of man.

. . . . . .

One test he knew would settle, at least to himself, the reality of the horror he had witnessed—either he had been mad on that day or the thing had not occurred. What of Crawley's brother? In his eyes he would surely read the truth.

The days of his convalescence were very happy and serene. It was easy after all to forget when the present was so full of sweetness. The moment came, however, when he found himself alone outside Donnington, and, in a sudden impulse, he turned towards the direction of the Crawleys' place. He went without haste and was hardly conscious of his own purpose. Tender thoughts of Rene permeated his person. Whatever happened she was his. . . .

As he approached up the avenue of dark trees he perceived that the man was on the verandah; a huddled heap he appeared from the distance, curiously stationary. It was uncanny that on his nearer approach he made no movement of welcome or seemed even conscious of a visitor's proximity. What Stuart however gathered at once was that the man was changed. The gross horror of his countenance was gone, the repulsive

bestiality, or, better said, the repulsive humanity—the beasts never have such defects.

When quite close to him Maxwell perceived that the man was paralysed and that he could not rise. The moment their eyes met he knew that it had all been no dream. A sudden look of fear, a searching questioning, fled over the brother's passive physiognomy, as if he too wanted to realise the truth by a human witness, and he did not fail to read his answer. There was no need on either side for words, the reality of the unspeakable united their souls.

They talked of other things. Stuart sat some time with him in the quiet serenity of the afternoon among the trees and the mantling ivy. Before he departed he saw peace steal back to the old man's face.

. . . . . .

PROPERTY OF THE THEOLOGICAL LIBRARY